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MADCAP VIOLET.

MADCAP VIOLET.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON,"
"A PRINCESS OF THULE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MADCAP VIOLET.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU DEVIL!"

THERE was a great silence in the schoolroom. A young girl of sixteen or seventeen, tall and strikingly handsome in figure, with abundant masses of raven-black hair, dark eyes under darker eyelashes, and proud and well-cut lips, walked up to the schoolmistress's table. There was scarcely anything of malice or mischief visible in the bold carelessness of her face.

The schoolmistress looked up from some accounts she had been studying.

"Well, Miss North?" she said, with marked surprise.

"I have a question to ask, if you please, Miss Main," said the handsome young lady, with great coolness and deliberation (and all the school was now listening intently). "I wish to ask what sort of society we are expected to meet when we go abroad, and whether foreigners are in the habit of using language which is not usually applied to ladies in this country. Half an hour ago, when we were having our German conversation with Dr. Siedl, he made use of a very odd phrase, and I believe it was addressed to me. He said, 'You devil!' I only wish to ask, Miss Main, whether we must be prepared to hear such phrases in the conversation of foreigners."

The schoolmistress's thin, grey, careworn face grew red with mortification. Yet, what could she do? There was nothing openly rebellious in the demeanour of this incorrigible girl—nothing, indeed, but a cool impertinence which was outwardly most respectful.

"You may return to your seat, Miss North," she said, rising, "I will inquire into this matter at once."

Miss Main, who was the proprietor as well as the head-mistress of the school, was greatly perturbed by this incident; and she was quite nervous and excited when she went into the room where the German master still sate, correcting some exercises. When he saw her enter, he rose at once; he guessed from her manner what had happened. The young man in the shabby clothes was even more excited than she was; and why? Because, two years before, he had left his home in the old-fashioned little fortress of Neisse, in Silesia, and he had bade good-bye then to a young girl whom he hoped to make his wife. England was a rich country. A few years of absence would put money in his pocket; and he would return with a good English pronunciation, which would be of value. So he came to England; but he did not find the streets paved with gold. It was after long waiting that he got his first appointment; and that appointment was the German mastership at Miss Main's school. At the present moment he believed he had forfeited this one chance.

He came forward to her; and she might have seen that there was something very like tears in his pale blue eyes.

"Yes, she has told you, and it is quite true," said he, throwing out his hands. "What can I say? But if you will forgif it, I will apolochise to her—I was mad—I do not know how I haf said soch a ting to a young lady, but I will apolochise to her, Meess Main——"

Miss Main had pulled herself together by this time.

"Really, I do not know what to do with her, Dr. Siedl," said she, in a sort of despairing way. "I have no doubt she irritated you beyond endurance; and although I am afraid you must apologise to her, I can quite understand how you were maddened by her. Sometimes, I do think she is a devil; that she has no human soul in her. She thinks of nothing but mischief from morning till night; and the worst of it is, that she leads the whole school into mischief, for all the girls appear to be fascinated by her, and will do anything she asks. I don't understand it. You know how often I have threatened her with expulsion: she does not mind. Sometimes I think I must really get rid of her; for it is almost impossible to preserve the discipline of the school while she is in it."

The German master was so overjoyed to find his own position secured and his offence practically condoned that he grew generous.

"And she is so clafer," said he.

"Clever?" repeated the schoolmistress. "During the whole of my twenty-five years' experience in schools I have never seen a scholar to equal her. There is nothing she cannot do when she takes it into her head to do it. You saw how she ran up her marks in French and German last term—and almost at the end of the term—merely because she had a spite against Miss Wolf, and was determined she should not have the two prizes that she expected. And that is another part of the mischief she does. Whenever she takes a special liking to a girl, she does her exercises for her in the evening. It costs her no trouble; and then she has them ready to go with her in every frolic. I am sure I don't know what to do with her."

The schoolmistress sighed.

"You see," she added, with a frank honesty, "it is naturally a great thing for a school like mine to have the daughter of Sir Acton North in it. Everybody has heard of him; then the girls go home and tell their mothers that a daughter of Lady North is at our school; then the mothers—you know what some people are—talk of that to their friends, and speak of Lady North as if they had known her all their lives. I do not know Lady North myself, but I am sure she is a wise woman not to have this girl in the same house with her."

After a few words more, Miss Main went back to the schoolroom; and we must do likewise, to narrate all that befel in her absence. First of all it was the invidious duty of a small, fair-haired, gentle-eyed girl, called Amy Warrener, to take a slate and write down on it the names of any of her companions who spoke while Miss Main was out of the room, failing to do which she was deprived of her marks for the day. Now, on this occasion, a pretty considerable tumult arose, and the little girl, looking frightened, and pretty nearly ready to cry, did not know what to do.

"Yes, you mean, spiteful little thing!" cried a big, fat, roseate girl, called Georgina Wolf, "put down all our names, do! I've a good mind to box your ears!"

She menaced the little girl, but only for a brief second. With a rapid "Have you really?" another young lady—the tallest in the school—appeared on the scene; and Miss Wolf received a ringing slap on the side of her head, which made her jump back, shrieking. The school was awe-struck. Never had such a thing occurred before. But presently one girl laughed, then another; then there was a general titter over Miss Wolf's alarm and discomfiture; during which the tall young lady called out—

"Amy Warrener, put us all down, and me at the head; for we are going to have a little amusement. Young ladies, shall I deliver a lecture to you on Old Calabar and our sewingclass? Young ladies, shall we have a little music?"

She had suddenly assumed the prim demeanour of Miss Main. With great gravity she walked over to the door, locked it, and put the key in her pocket. Then she went to her own desk, smuggled something into a light shawl, and proceeded to the mistress's table, behind which she took her stand.

"Young ladies," she said, pretending to look at them through an imaginary pair of eye-glasses, "you are aware that it is the shocking practice of the little boys and girls in many districts of Africa to go about without clothes; and you are aware of the Camberwell Society for helping the missionaries to take out a few garments to these poor little things. Now, my dears, it is a useful thing for a seminary like mine to gain a reputation for being charitable; and if we manage amongst ourselves to send from month to month parcels of beautifully-sewn garments, everyone must get to know how well I teach you, my dears, to handle your needle. But then, my dears, you must not all expect to join in this good work. You all get the credit of being charitable; but some of you are not so smart with your needle as others; and so I think it better to have the sewing of these garments entrusted to one or two of you, who ought to feel proud of the distinction. Do you understand me, my dears? Now some of you, I have no doubt, would like to see what sort of young people wear the beautiful dresses which your pocket-money and your industry send out to Africa. I have here the little pink frock which you, Miss Morrison, finished yesterday; and if you will grant me a moment's patience—"

She took the pink frock from the table, and for a second or two stooped down behind the table-cover. When she rose, it appeared that she had smuggled a large black doll into the school; and now the black and curly head of the doll surmounted the pink cotton garment with its white frills. There was a yell of laughter. She stuck the doll on the edge of the table; she put a writing-desk behind it to support it; she hit it on the side of the head when it did not sit straight. An indescribable tumult followed: all possible consequences were cast aside.

"Now, my dears, what hymn shall we sing to entertain the little stranger? Shall it be 'Away down south in Dixie'?"

The school had gone mad. With one accord the girls began to shout the familiar air to any sort of words, led by the tall young lady behind the table, who flourished a ruler in place of a *bâton*. She did not know the words herself; she simply led the chorus with any sort of phrases.

"Oh it's Dixie's land that I was born in,
Early on a frosty morning,
In the land! In the land! In the land!
In the land!"

"A little more spirit, my dears! A little louder, if you please!"

"Oh I wish I was in Dixie, oho! oho!
In Dixie's land to take my stand,
And live and die in Dixie's land,
Oho! Oho!
Away down South in Dixie!"

"That's better. Now *pianissimo*—the sadness of thinking about Dixie—you understand?"

They sang it softly; and she pretended to wipe the eyes of the negro doll in the pink dress.

"Now, *fortissimo!*" she cried, flourishing her *bâton.* "Going, going, for the last time. Take the word from me, my dears!"

"Oh I wish I was in Dixie,
Oho! Oho!
In Dixie's land to take my stand,
And live and die in Dixie's land,
Oho! Oho!
Away down South in Dixie!"

But the singing of this verse had been accompanied by certain strange noises.

"Open the door, Miss North, or I will break it open!" called the mistress from without, in awful tones.

"My dears, resume your tasks—instantly!" said Miss Violet North; and with that she snatched the doll out of the pink costume, and hurriedly flung it into her private desk. Then she walked to the door alone.

The hubbub had instantly subsided. All eyes were bent upon the books before them; but all ears were listening for the dreadful interview between Violet North and the schoolmistress.

The tall young girl, having made quite sure that her companions were quiet and orderly, opened the door. The mistress marched in in a terrible rage—in such a rage that she could hardly speak.

"Miss North," she cried, "what is the meaning of this disgraceful uproar?"

"Uproar, Miss Main?" said she, with innocent wonder. "The young ladies are very quiet."

"What is the meaning of your having bolted this door—how dare you bolt the door?"

"Yes, I thought there was something the matter with the lock," she answered, scanning the door critically. "But you ought not to be vexed by that. And now I will bid you good morning."

Thus she saved herself from being expelled. She coolly walked into an adjacent room, put on her hat, took her small umbrella, and went out. As it was a pleasant morning, she thought she would go for a walk.

CHAPTER II.

CARPE DIEM.

THIS girl was as straight as a dart; and she knew how to suit her costume to her fine figure, her bright and clear complexion, and her magnificent black hair. She wore a tight-fitting, tight-sleeved dress of grey homespun, and a grey hat with a scarlet feather—this bold dash of red being the only bit of pronounced colour about her. There was no self-conscious trickery of ornament visible on her costume—indeed, there was no self-consciousness of any sort about the girl. She had a thoroughly pagan delight in the present moment. The past was nothing to her; she had no fear of the future; life was enjoyable enough from hour to hour, and she enjoyed it accordingly. She never paused to think how handsome she was, for she was tolerably indifferent as to what other people thought of her. She was well-satisfied with herself, and well-satisfied with the world—especially when there was plenty of fun going about; her fine health gave her fine spirits; her bold, careless, self-satisfied nature took no heed of criticism or reproof, and caused her to laugh at the ordinary troubles of girl-life; not even this great fact that she had practically run away from school was sufficient to upset her superb equanimity.

Incessit reginâ. There was nothing of the gawky and shambling schoolgirl in her free, frank step, and her erect and graceful carriage. When she met either man or woman, she looked him or her straight in the face; then probably turned her eyes away indifferently to regard the flight of a rook, or the first blush of rose-colour on a red hawthorn. For, on leaving school, Miss North found herself in the higher reaches of Camberwell Grove, and in this richly-wooded district the glad new life of the spring was visible in the crisp, uncurled leaves of the chestnuts, and in the soft green of the mighty elms, and in the white and purple of the lilacs in the gardens of the quaint, old-fashioned houses. Never had any spring come to us so quickly as that one. All England had lain black and cold under the grip of a hard and tenacious winter; even the end of March found us with bitter east winds, icy roads, and leafless trees. Then all of a sudden came south winds and warm rains; and the wet, grey skies parted at times to give us a brilliant glimpse of blue. The work of transformation was magical in its swiftness. Far away in secret places the subtle fire of the earth upsprang in pale primroses, in sweet violets, and in the glossy and golden celandine that presaged the coming of buttercups into the meadows. The almond-trees, even in suburban gardens, shone out with a sudden glow of pink and purple. The lilac bushes opened their green leaves to the warm rains. The chestnuts unclasped their resinous buds. And then, with a great wild splendour of blue sky and warm sunlight, the bountiful, mild, welcome spring came fully upon us; and all the world was filled with the laden blossoms of fruit-trees, and the blowing of sweet winds, and the singing of thrushes and blackbirds. To be abroad on such a morning was better than sitting over an Italian exercise in Miss Main's schoolroom.

"What sort of tree is that?" Miss Violet North asked of a little boy: a particular tree in one of the old-fashioned gardens had struck her fancy.

"Dunnow," said the boy, sulkily.

"Then why don't you know, you little donkey you!" she said, indifferently passing on.

She crossed Grove Lane, and went along the summit of Champion Hill, under the shade of a magnificent row of chestnuts. Could leaves be greener, could the sweet air be sweeter, could the fair spring sunshine be more brilliant in the remotest of English valleys? Here were country-looking houses, with sloping gardens, and little fancy farms attached; here were bits of woodland, the remains of the primeval forest, allowed to grow up into a sort of wilderness; here were rooks flying about their nests, and thrushes busy on the warm green lawns, and blackbirds whirring from one laurel-bush to another. She walked along to the end of this thoroughfare until she came to a lane which led abruptly down hill, facing the south. Far away below her lay the green meadows of Dulwich ; and beyond the trees, and looking pale and spectral in the glare of the heat, rose the towers of the Crystal Palace. That was enough. She had nothing particular to do. Walking was a delight to her on such a morning. Without any specific resolve she indolently set out for the Crystal Palace.

There was indolence in her purpose, but none in her gait. She walked smartly enough down the steep and semi-private thoroughfare which is called Green Lane; she crossed the pleasant meadows by the narrow pathway; she got out upon the Dulwich road, and so continued her way to the Palace. But she was not to reach the goal of her journey without an adventure.

She was just passing the gateway leading up to a large house when a negro-page, very tall, very black, and wearing a bottle-green livery, with scarlet cuffs and collar, came out of the garden into the road, followed by a little terrier. The appearance of this lanky black boy amused her; and so, as a friendly mark of recognition, she drew her umbrella across the ground in front of the terrier just as she was passing, and said, "Pfst!" But this overture was instantly rejected by the terrier, which turned upon her with voluble rage, yelping, barking, coming nearer and nearer, and threatening to spring upon her. For a second she retreated in dismay; then, as she saw that the negro-boy was more frightened than herself, she became wildly angry.

"Why don't you take your dog away?" she cried; "you—you stick of black sealing-wax!"

In this moment of dire distress help came to her from an unexpected quarter. A young gentleman quickly crossed the road, approached the irate terrier from the rear, and gave the animal a sharp cut with his walking-stick.

The rapidity of this flank movement completely took the terrier by surprise; with a yelp, more of alarm and astonishment than of pain, it fled into the garden and was seen no more.

Violet North looked up—and now her face was consciously red, for she had been ignominiously caught in a fright.

"I am sorry you should have been alarmed," said the young man; and he had a pleasant voice.

"Yes, the nasty little brute!" said she; and then recollecting that that was not the manner in which a stranger should be addressed, she said, "I thank you very much for driving the dog away—it was very kind of you."

"Oh, it was nothing," said he; "I am very glad I happened to be by." He lifted his hat, said, "Good morning!" and passed on in front of her.

She looked after him. Had she ever seen so handsome, so beautiful a young man? Never!

Just at the present moment several of our English artists are very fond of painting a particular type of feminine beauty—a woman with a low and broad forehead, large, indolent, sleepy blue eyes, thin cheeks, short upper lip, full under lip, somewhat square jaw, and magnificent throat. It is a beautiful head enough—languid, unintellectual, semi-sensuous, but beautiful. Now this young man was as near as possible a masculine version of that indolent, beautiful, mystic-eyed woman whose face one meets in dusky corners of drawing-rooms, or in the full glare of exhibitions. He was no mere roseate youth, flabby-cheeked and curly-locked, such as a school-girl might try to paint in crude water-colours. His appearance was striking; there was something refined, special, characteristic about his features; and, moreover, he had not cropped his hair as our modern youths are wont to do—the short wavy locks of light brown nearly reached his shirt-collar. For the rest he was sparely built, perhaps about five feet eight, square-shouldered, light and active in figure. Was there any harm in a school-girl admitting to herself that he was a very good-looking young man?

Walking about the Crystal Palace by one's-self is not the most exciting of amusements. The place was very familiar to Miss North; and she had lost interest in the copper-coloured aborigines, and in the wonderful pillar of gold. But she had one little bit of enjoyment. She caught sight of a small boy, who, when nobody was looking, was trying to "job" one of the cockatoos with the end of a toy-whip. Well, also when nobody was looking, she took occasion to get behind this little boy, and then she gave him a gentle push, which was just sufficient to let the cockatoo, making a downward dip at his enemy's head, pull out a goodly tuft of hair. There was a frightful squeal of alarm from the boy; but in a second she was round in some occult historical chamber, studying with becoming gravity the lessons taught us by the tombs of kings.

Then she became very hungry, and she thought she would go and have some luncheon. When she entered the dining-room she was a little shy—not much; but she was speedily attended by a friendly old waiter, who quite put her at her ease. When he asked her what she would take, she was on the point of answering, "Cold beef, if you please," as she would have done at school, but she suddenly bethought herself that, being in a restaurant, she might have something better, and so she asked for the bill of fare, scanned it, and finally ordered an oyster *pâté* and a couple of lamb cutlets, with green peas and tomatoes.

"And what will you take to drink, miss?" said the old waiter.

"Some water, thank you," she said; but directly afterwards she added, "Wait a moment—I think I will take a glass of sherry, if you please."

So the waiter departed; and she turned to glance at her surroundings. The first thing she noticed, much to her surprise and mortification, was that she had inadvertently sat down at the table at which, on the opposite side and further along, the young man was having lunch to whom she had spoken in the morning. She was annoyed. What must he think of a young lady who went wandering about the country by herself, and coolly walked into restaurants to order cutlets and sherry ? It was rather a strange circumstance that Miss North should be troubled by this conjecture ; for she rarely, if ever, paid the least attention to what people might think of her ; but on this occasion she began to wish she might have some opportunity of explaining her conduct.

The opportunity occurred. That friendly old waiter had apparently forgotten the order ; anyhow, the girl sate there patiently, and nothing was brought to her. She wished to attract the attention of the waiter, and made one or two attempts, but failed. Seeing the plight she was in, the young gentleman on the other side of the table made bold to address her, and said—

" I beg your pardon, but I fear they are not attending to you. Will you allow me to speak to one of the waiters ? "

" I wish you would," she said, blushing a little bit.

The young man walked off and got hold of the manager, to whom he made his complaint. Then he came back; and Miss North was more anxious than ever to justify herself in his eyes. The notion was becoming quite desperate that he might go away thinking she knew so little of propriety as to be in the habit of frequenting restaurants all by herself.

"I am very much obliged to you—again," she said, with something of an embarrassed smile. "I believed they meant to punish me for going away from school."

"From school?" said he, doubtfully; and he drew his chair a little nearer.

"Yes," said she, resolved at any cost to put herself right in his opinion. "I ought to have been at school. I—I walked away—and one gets hungry, you know. I—I thought it was better to come in here."

"Oh yes, certainly," said he; "why not?"

"I have always been left a good deal to myself," said this anxious young lady, leading up to her *grand coup.* "My father is always away looking after railways, and I dislike my stepmother, so that I am never at home. Of course you have heard of my father's name—Sir Acton North?"

Now she was satisfied. He would know she was not some giddy maid-servant out for a holiday. She uttered the words clearly, so that there should be no mistake, and perhaps a trifle proudly; then she waited for him to withdraw his chair again and resume his luncheon. But he did nothing of the sort.

"Oh yes," said he, with a respectful earnestness, "everyone has heard of Sir Acton North. I am very pleased that—that I have been of any little service to you. I daresay, now, you have heard of my father too—George Miller?"

"No, I have not," she said, seriously, as though her ignorance of that distinguished name were a grave blot on her bringing up.

"Well, you know," said the handsome young man, meekly, "he is pretty well known as a merchant, but better known as a Protestant. He takes the chairs at meetings, and gives big subscriptions, and all that kind of thing. I believe the Pope can't sleep in his bed o' nights on account of him."

"I—I think I have heard of him," said Miss North, conscious that she ought to know something of so important a person.

At this point she was distinctly of opinion that the conversation should cease. Young ladies are not supposed to talk to young gentlemen to whom they have not been introduced, even although they may have heard of each other's parents as being distinguished people. But George Miller the younger seemed a pleasant young man, who had a frank smile, and an obvious lack of stiffness and circumspection in his nature. They had brought her the oyster *pâté;* now came the cutlets.

"That was the mistake you made," said he, venturing to smile. "When you are in a hurry you should not order out-of-the-way things, or they are sure to keep you waiting."

"I never came into a restaurant by myself before," she said, with some asperity: would this foolish young man persist in the notion that she habitually ordered luncheon in such a fashion?

"What school was it you left, may I ask?" said he, with a friendly interest in his eyes.

"Oh!" she answered, with a return to her ordinary careless manner, "Miss Main's Seminary in Camberwell Grove. I knew she was going to expel me. We had had a little amusement when she was out of the room—a little too much noise, in fact—and though she has often threatened to expel me, I saw by her face she meant mischief this time. So I left. What a pleasant morning it was for a walk!"

"Yes," said he, looking rather puzzled; "but — but — what are you going to do now?"

"Now? Oh, I don't know! There will be plenty of time for me to settle where I am going when I get back to town."

"Are you going back to London all by yourself?"

"I came here by myself: why not?"

"Well," said he, with some real anxiety, "it is rather an unusual thing for a young lady to be going about like that. I think you ought to—to go home——"

"My father is in Yorkshire; I would rather not go to see my stepmother. We should have rather a warm evening of it, I imagine," she added frankly.

"Where, then——?"

"Oh, I know where to go!" she said, indifferently. "There is a little girl at the school I am very fond of, and she is very fond of me; and she and her mother live with her uncle in Camberwell Grove, not far from the school. They will take me in, I know; they are very kind people."

By this time she had finished her luncheon—the young man had neglected his altogether—and she asked the waiter for her bill. She certainly had plenty of money in her purse; she gave the old gentleman who had systematically not attended to her a shilling for himself.

"Would you allow me to see you into a carriage," timidly suggested Mr. George Miller, "if you are going up by rail?"

"Oh no!" she said, with a sweet smile, "I can take care of myself."

Which was true.

"Then," said he, "Miss North, I am afraid I cannot claim you as an acquaintance—because—because our meeting has been rather—rather informal, as it were; but would you allow me, supposing I were introduced to your father——"

"Oh, I should like you to know my father well enough," said she, honestly.

"That was not what I meant exactly," said he. "I meant that if I got to know your father, that would be a sort of equivalent—don't you think?—to a formal introduction to you."

The girl very nearly burst out laughing.

"I think we are pretty well introduced already," said she, "by means of a terrier-dog and a stupid waiter. Thank you very much for your kindness. Good afternoon."

She was going away with her ordinary erect carriage and careless bearing, when he suddenly put out his hand to shake hands with her. She had risen by this time. Well, she could not be guilty of the discourtesy of a refusal; and so she allowed him to shake hands with her.

"I hope this is not the last time we shall meet," said he, with an earnestness which rather surprised her, and which she did not fail to remember when she got into the quiet corner of a railway carriage. Did he really wish to see her again? Was there a chance of their meeting? What would properly-conducted people say of her adventures of that morning?

She did not care much. She got out at Denmark Hill Station, and placidly walked up to the house of Mr. James Drummond, which was situated near the top of Camberwell Grove.

CHAPTER III.

A SUBURBAN PHILOSOPHER.

THIS house was rather like a toy-cottage—a long, low, rambling place, with a veranda all round, ivy trained up the pillars, French windows, small peaked gables, some few trees and bushes in front, and a good garden behind. Miss North did not wait for an answer to her summons. She bethought herself that she would be sure to find Mr. Drummond, or his widowed sister Mrs. Warrener, or his niece Amy Warrener, in the garden; and so she made her way round the house by a side path. Here, indeed, she found Mr. Drummond. He was seated in the veranda, in a big reading chair; one leg was crossed over the other; he was smoking a long clay pipe; but instead of improving his mind by reading, he was simply idling and dreaming—looking out on the bushes and the blossom-laden trees, over which a dusky red sky was now beginning to burn.

He jumped up from his seat when he saw her, and rather unwisely began to laugh. He was a tall, thin, somewhat ungainly man, with curiously irregular features, the expression of which seldom remained the same for a couple of seconds together. Yet there was something attractive about this strange face—about its keen, vivacious intelligence and its mobile tendency to laugh; and there was no doubt about the fine character of the eyes—full, clear, quick to apprehend, and yet soft and winning. Violet North had a great liking and regard for this friend of hers; but sometimes she stood a little in awe of him. She could not altogether follow his quick, playful humour; she was always suspecting sarcasm behind his drolleries; it was clear to her that, whatever was being talked about, he saw far more than she or anybody else saw, for he would suddenly burst into a prodigious roar of merriment over some point or other wholly invisible to her or to his sister. The man, indeed, had all the childish fun of a man of genius; and a man of genius he undoubtedly was, though he had never done anything to show to the world, nor was likely to do anything. Early in life he had been cursed by a fatal inheritance of somewhere about 600*l.* a year. He was incurably indolent—that is to say, his brain was on the hop, skip, and jump from morning till night, performing all manner of intellectual feats for his own private amusement; but as for any settled work, or settled habits, he would have nothing of either. He was a very unworldly person—careless of the ordinary aims of the life around him; but he had elaborated a vast amount of theories to justify his indolence. He belonged to a good family; he never called on his rich or distinguished relatives. At college he was celebrated as a brilliant and ready debater, and as a capricious, whimsical, but altogether delightful conversationalist; he was fairly studious, and obviously clear-headed; yet no one ever left a university with less of glory surrounding him. He had a large number of friends, and they all loved him; but they knew his faults. He had no more notion of time than a bird or a butterfly; he was scarcely ever known to catch the train for which he set out: but then, what ill-temper on the part of a companion could withstand the perfectly happy fashion in which he would proceed to show that a railway-station was an excellent place for reflection? Then he had a bewildering love of paradox—especially puzzling to a certain ingenuous young lady who sometimes sat and mutely listened to his monologues. Then he was very unfair in argument; he would patiently lead his opponent on in the hope that at last this unprincipled debater was about to be driven into a corner—when lo! there was some sort of twitch about the odd face, a glimmer of humour in the fine eyes, and with some preposterous joke he was off, like a squirrel up a tree, leaving his antagonist discomfited below.

He led his sister a hard life of it. The pale, little, fair-haired woman had a great faith in her brother; she believed him to be the best and the cleverest man that ever lived; and no one with less good-nature than herself could have listened patiently to the whimsical extravagances of this incorrigible talker. For the worst about him was that he made remarks at random—suggested by the book he was reading, or by some passing circumstance—and then, when his puzzled interlocutor was trying to comprehend him, he was off to something else, quite unconscious that he had left the other a continent or a century behind him. Sometimes, indeed, he made a wild effort to show that this or that abrupt observation was *à propos* to something—which it never was.

"Do you know," he would say to his patient sister, "I fancy I see something in Fawcett of a sort of political Shelley."

A moment's silence.

"Yes, James," his sister would say, seriously, "but in what way?"

Another moment's silence.

"Oh, about Fawcett? Well, I was thinking, do you know, that if the House of Commons were to introduce a Bill securing universal suffrage, this little terrier here would die of despair and disgust. That is the one weak point about dogs—you can't convey to them any impression of moral grandeur. It is all fine clothes with them, and gentlemanly appearance—the virtues hidden beneath a shabby costume are unknown to them. Frosty, here, would wag her tail and welcome the biggest swindler that ever brought out sham companies ; but she would be suspicious of the honest workman; and she would snap at the calves of the most deserving of beggars. Sarah, you really must cease that habit of yours of indiscriminate almsgiving—fancy the impostors you must be encouraging——"

His sister opened her eyes in mild protest. "Why, it was only yesterday you gave that old Frenchman half-a-crown——"

"Well," said he, uncomfortably, "well—you see—I thought that—that even if he was shamming, he looked such an unfortunate poor devil—but that is only a single case. There is a systematic outrage on your part, Sarah, of the common principles of prudence——"

"You do it far more than I do," she said, with a quiet laugh; and so she went her way, only she had got no information as to how Mr. Fawcett resembled a political Shelley.

Only one word needs to be added at present to this hasty and imperfect description of a bright and sparkling human individuality, the thousand facets of which could never be seen at once and from the same stand-point. There was no jealousy in the man's nature of men who were more successful in the world than himself. He had a sort of profession—that is to say, he occasionally wrote articles for this or that learned review. But he was far too capricious and uncertain to be entrusted with any sustained and continuous work; and, indeed, even with incidental work, he frequently vexed the soul of the most indulgent of editors. No one could guess what view of a particular book or question he might not take at a moment's notice. 'Of course, if it had not been for that fatal 600*l.* a year, he might have been put in harness, and accomplished some substantial work. Even if he had had any extravagant tastes, something in that way might have been done; but the little household lived very economically (except as regards charity and the continual giving of presents to friends), its chief and important expense being the cost of a long and happy holiday in the autumn. There was no jealousy, as I have said, in Drummond's nature over the success of more practical men; no grudging, no detraction, no spite. The fire of his life burnt too keenly and joyously to have any smoke about it.

"Mind you," he would say—always to his consentient audience of one, "it is a serious thing for a man to endeavour to become famous. He cannot tell until he tries—and tries for years—whether there is anything in him; and then, look at the awful risk of failure and life-long diappointment. You see, when once you enter the race for fame or for great riches, you can't very well give in. You're bound in honour not to give in. The presence of rivals all round you—and what is stronger still, the envious cavilling of the disappointed people, and the lecturing you get from the feebler Jabberwocks of criticism—all that kind of thing must, I should fancy, drive a man on in spite of himself. But don't you think it is wiser for people who are not thrust into the race by some unusual consciousness of power to avoid it altogether and live a quieter and more peaceable life?"

Sarah did think so; she was always sure that her brother was right, even when he flatly contradicted himself, and he generally did that half-a-dozen times in the day.

"Well, Miss Violet," he said to the young lady who had suddenly presented herself before him, "I hear you have rather distinguished yourself to-day."

"Yes," she said, with an embarrassed laugh, "I believe I have done it this time."

"And what do you mean to do now?"

"I don't know."

"And don't care, perhaps?"

"Not much."

He shrugged his shoulders. But at this moment his sister came through the small drawing-room into the veranda; and there was far more concern visible on her face. Mr. Drummond seemed to have but a speculative interest in this curious human phenomenon but his sister had a vivid affection for the girl who had befriended her daughter at school and become her sworn ally and champion. Both of them, it is true, were considerably attracted towards Miss North. To him there was something singularly fascinating in her fine, unconscious enjoyment of the mere fact of living, in her audacious frankness, and even in the shrewd, clear notions about things that had got into her school-girl brain. In many respects this girl was more a woman of the world than her gentle friend and timid adviser, Mrs. Warrener. As for Mrs. Warrener, she had almost grown to love this bold, frank, sincere, plain - spoken companion of her daughter; but she derived no amusement, as her brother did, from the girl's wild ways and love of fun, which occasionally made her rather anxious. To her it was not always a laughing matter.

"Oh, Violet," she said, "what have you been about this time? What can we do for you?"

"Well, not very much, I am afraid," was the rueful answer.

Apparently Miss Violet was rather ashamed of her exploit; and yet there was a curious, half-concealed, comic expression about the face of the penitent which did not betoken any great self-abasement.

"Shall I take you home?" said James Drummond, "and get your parents to come over and intercede for you?"

"No," she said, "that would be no use; my father is in Yorkshire."

"But Lady North——?"

"I should like to see my stepmother go out of her way the length of a yard on my account! She never did like me; but she has hated me worse than ever since Euston Square."

"Euston Square—— ?"

"Yes," continued the girl, "don't you know that I am a sort of equivalent for Euston Square?"

"This is becoming serious," said Mr. Drummond; "if you are about to amuse us with conundrums we had better all sit down. Here is a chair for you. Sarah, sit down. And so you were saying that you were an equivalent, Miss Violet?"

"Yes," she observed, coolly folding her hands on her knees. "It is not a very long story. You know my stepmother was never a very fashionable person. Her father—well, her father built rows of cheap villas in the suburbs, on speculation; and he lived in Highbury; and he told you the price of the wines at dinner—you know the kind of man. But when she married my father"—there was always a touch of pride in the way Miss North said "my father"—"she had a great notion of getting from Highbury to Park Lane, or Palace Gardens, or Lancaster Gate, or some such place, and having a big house and trying to get into society. Well, you see, that would not suit my father at all. He almost lives on railways; he is not once a week in London; and he knows Euston Square a good deal better than Belgravia. So he proposed to my stepmother that if she would consent to have a house in Euston Square, for his convenience, he would study her convenience and comfort, by allowing me to remain permanently at a boarding-school. Do you see? I can tell you I rejoiced when I heard of that bargain; for the house that my stepmother and I were in was a good deal too small for both of us. Yet I don't think she had always the best of it."

This admission was made so modestly, simply, and unconsciously, that Mr. Drummond burst into a roar of laughter, while his sister looked a trifle shocked.

"What did you do to her?" said he.

"Oh, women can always find ways of annoying each other, when they wish it," she answered, coolly.

"Well," said Mr. Drummond, "we must see what can be done. Let us have a turn in the garden, and talk over this pretty situation of affairs."

They descended the few steps. Mrs. Warrener linked the girl's arm in hers, and took her quietly along the narrow garden path, James Drummond walking beside them on the lawn. There was a strange contrast between the two women—the one tall, straight and lithe as a willow wand, proud-lipped, frank, happy, and courageous of face, with all the light of youth and strength shining in her eyes; the other tender, small, and wistful, with sometimes an anxious and apprehensive contraction of the brows. By the side of these two the philosopher walked—a long and lanky person, stooping somewhat, talking a good deal of nonsense to tease his companions, ready to explode at a moment's notice into a great burst of hearty and genuine laughter, and ready at the same time to tender any sacrifice, however great, that this girl could claim of him, or his sister suggest. For the rest, it was a beautiful evening in this still and secluded suburban garden. The last flush of rose-red was dying out of the sky, over the great masses of blossom on the fruit-trees. There was a cooler feeling in the air; and the sweet odour of the lilac-bushes seemed to become still more prevailing and sweet.

"Don't look on me as an encumbrance," said Miss North, frankly. "I only came to you for a bit of advice. I shall pull through somehow."

"We shall never look upon you as an encumbrance, dear," said Mrs. Warrener, in her kindly way. "You know you can always come and stay with us, if the worst comes to the worst."

"I think that would be the worst coming to the best," said the girl, demurely.

"My notion," said Mr. Drummond, trying to catch at a butterfly that was obviously getting home in a hurry—"is that you ought to give Miss Main a night to cool down her wrath; and then in the morning I will go round and intercede for you. I suppose you are prepared to apologize to her."

"Oh yes," Miss North said, but not with the air of a conscious sinner.

"Miss Main, I fancy now," continued the philosopher, "is the sort of woman who would be easily pacified. So far as I have seen her, there is little pretence about her, and no vanity. It is only very vain people, you will find, who are easily mortified and implacable in their resentment. The vain man is continually turning his eyes inwards and addressing himself thus—'Sir, I most humbly beg your pardon for having brought discomfiture and ridicule on so august and important a personage as yourself.' He is always worshipping that little idol within him; and if anybody throws a pellet of mud at it, he will never forgive the insult. A vain man——"

"But about Miss Main, James?" said his sister. She had never any scruple about interrupting him, if any business was on hand; for she knew that, failing the interruption, he would go wandering all over the world.

"Oh yes—Miss Main. Well, Miss Main, I say, does not appear to be a morbidly vain person, likely to be implacable. I think the best thing you can do is to stay with us to-night, and to-morrow morning I will go round to Miss Main, and try to pacify her——"

"I hope you won't laugh at her, James," his sister suggested.

"My dear woman, I am the most diplomatic person in the world—as, for example: we are going in presently to dinner. Dinner without a fire in the grate is an abomination. Now, if I were to suggest to you to have a log of wood put on — a regular blazer, for the night is becoming chill—something to cheer us and attract the eyes, just as you always see the eyes of infants attracted by flames. And where is Amy?" he added, suddenly.

"I have no doubt," said Miss North, with humility, "that Amy is being kept out of the way, so that she sha'n't meet a wicked person like me."

"Indeed, no," said Mrs. Warrener, though sometimes she certainly did not consider Miss Violet's conduct a good example for her daughter. "Amy is at her lessons; she is coming in to dinner to-night."

"Oh, do let me go and help her!" said the visitor. "And I promise to tell her how bad

I have been, and how I am never going to do so any more."

So, for the time, the little party was broken up; but it met again in a short time, in a quaint little room that was cheerfully lit, round a bright table, and in view of a big log that was blazing in the fireplace. The banquet was not a gorgeous one—the little household had the simplest tastes—but it was flavoured throughout by a friendly kindness, a good humour, a sly merriment that was altogether delightful. Then, after the frugal meal was over, they drew their chairs into a semi-circle before the fire—Mr. Drummond being enthroned in his especial reading-chair, and having his pipe brought him by his niece. Violet North was pretty familiar with those quiet, bright, talkative evenings in this little home; and though at times she was a little perplexed by the paradoxes of the chief controversialist, she was not so much of a school-girl as not to perceive the fine, clear, intellectual fire that played about his idle talk like summer lightning, while all unconsciously to herself she was drinking in something of the charm of the great unworldliness of this little household which promised to be of especial benefit to a girl of her nature. She did not always understand him; but she was always delighted with him. If the quaint humour of some suggestion was rather too recondite for her, she could at least recognise the reflection of it in his face, and its curious irregular lines. Sir Acton North was not aware that his daughter was attending two schools, and this one the more important of the two. Here she saw nothing but gentleness and tender helpfulness; here she heard nothing but generous criticism, and humorous excuses for human faults, and laughter with no sting in it; here she was taught nothing but toleration, and the sinking of self, and the beauty of all good and true things. Then she did not know she was being taught any more than her teachers knew they were teaching her; for one of them spoke to her only by way of her own example, which was that of all sweetness and charity, and the other was so little of a lecturer that he shocked his own pupil by his whimsical extravagances and incorrigible laughter. If, as Miss Main was convinced, this girl had no soul, she could not have come to a better place to get some sort of substitute.

Next morning James Drummond went round and saw Miss Main. That patient, hard-working, and hardly-tried little woman confessed frankly that she herself would be quite willing to have Miss North come back, but she feared the effect on her other pupils of condoning so great an offence. However, Mr. Drummond talked her over; and an arrangement having been come to about the public apology Miss North was to make, he went back home.

Miss North had just come in breathless. She had run half a mile down hill, to the shops of Camberwell, and half a mile back, since he had gone out: she would not tell him why.

Well, she went round to the seminary in due course; and in the midst of an awful silence she walked up the middle of the floor to Miss Main's table.

"Miss Main, I have to beg your pardon for my conduct of yesterday, and I wish to be allowed to apologize to the whole school."

"You may go to your seat, Miss North," said the schoolmistress, who was a nervous little woman and glad to get it over.

Miss North, with great calmness of feature, but with a suggestion of a latent laugh in her fine dark eyes, walked sedately and properly to her seat, and opened her desk. With the lid well up she deposited inside a curious little collection of oddities she had taken from her pocket—including a number of little paper pellets, a small tin goblet, and a wooden monkey at the end of a stick.

The pellets were crackers which she could jerk with her finger and thumb to any part of the room, and which exploded on falling.

The toy goblet had a bit of string attached, and was intended for the cat's tail.

The wooden monkey was an effigy to be suddenly presented to the school whenever Miss Main's back was turned.

These had been the object of Miss Violet's sudden race down to Camberwell and back; so it was sufficiently clear that that young lady's remorse over her evil deeds was not of a very serious or probably lasting character.

CHAPTER IV.

FLUTTERINGS NEAR THE FLAME.

A SECRET rumour ran through the school that Violet North had not only got a sweetheart, but was also engaged in the composition of a novel. As regards the novel, at least, rumour was right; and there is now no longer any reason for suppressing the following pages, which will give an idea of the scope and style of Miss North's story. The original is written in a clear, bold hand, and the lines are wide apart—so wide apart, indeed, that the observant reader can, if he chooses, easily read between them.

"It was a beautiful morning in May, and the golden sunshine was flooding the emerald meadows of D——, an ancient and picturesque village about two miles nearer London than the C—— P——. Little do the inhabitants of that great city, who lend themselves to the glittering follies of fashion—little do they reck of the verdant beauties and the pure air which are to be had almost within the four-mile radius. It was on such a morning that our two lovers met, far away from the haunts of men, and living for each other alone. In the distance was a highway leading up to that noble institution, the C—— P——, and carriages rolled along it; and at the front of the stately mansions high-born dames vaulted upon their prancing barbs and caracoled away towards the horizon.[1] Our lovers paid no heed to such pomps and vanities; they were removed above earthly things by the sweet companionship of congenial souls; they lived in an atmosphere of their own, and breathed a delight which the callous votaries of fashion could neither understand nor share.

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[1] This sentence, or the latter half of it, may recall a passage in a famous novel which was published two or three years ago; and I hasten to say that Miss North had really never read that work. The brilliant and distinguished author of the novel in question has so frequently been accused of plagiarism which was almost certainly unconscious, that I am sure he will sympathize with this young aspirant, and acquit her of any intentional theft.

"Virginia Northbrook was the name of the one. Some would have called her rather good-looking; but it is not of that we mean to boast. We would rather speak of the lofty poetry of her soul, and of her desire to be just and honourable, and to live a noble life. Alas! how many of us can fulfil our wishes in that respect? The snares and temptations of life beset us on every side and dog our footsteps; but enough of this moralising, gentle reader, we must get on with our story.

"She was the daughter of a baronet, not a man of high lineage, but one on whom the eyes of the world were fixed. He had accelerated the industries of his native land in opening up stupendous commercial highways, and from all parts of the globe his advice was sought. Alas! he was frequently away from home, and as his second wife was a wretched and mean-spirited creature, Virginia Northbrook may be considered to have been really an orphan.

"The other of our two lovers was called Gilbert Mount-Dundas. Neither was he of high lineage; but a grand nobility of nature was stamped on his forehead. His father had attained to great fame through his labours in the cause of benevolence and charity; but it is not necessary to import him into our story. Gilbert Mount-Dundas was yet young; but his mind was fired by great ambitions, and what more necessary to encourage these than the loving counsel and worship of a woman? Ah, woman, woman, if you could understand how we men are indebted to you when you cheer us onward in the hard struggle of life! A ministering angel thou, truly, as the poet writes. If thou couldst perceive the value which we place on thy assistance, then thou wouldst never be capricious, coy, and hard to please. *Mais revenons à nos moutons.*

"It would be a difficult, nay, an invidious task, to describe the manner in which our two lovers became acquainted with each other. Suffice it to say that, although the world might look coldly on certain informalities, their own souls informed them that they had no cause to blush for their mutual acquaintance, an acquaintance which had ripened into knowledge, esteem, and love! Not for these two, indeed, was the ordinary commonplace history of a courtship and marriage; which, as the gentle reader knows, is an introduction at a dinner-table, a lot of foolish conversation always under the eyes of friends, an engagement with everybody's knowledge and consent (*including the lawyer's*), and a marriage to be advertised in the newspapers! No, no! —there is still some romance in this cold and heartless world; and, whatever harsh critics may say, we, for one, have no intention of blaming Gilbert Mount-Dundas and Virginia Northbrook simply because, forsooth! the whole host of their friends did not happen to be present. And yet—for who knows into whose hands these pages may not fall?—we must guard against a misconception. We are not of those who scorn the ceremonies of our social life—far from it; and we would not be understood as recommending to the youth of both sexes a lofty contempt for the proper *convenances. Tout au contrarie.* In our opinion a young lady cannot be too particular as to the acquaintances she makes; and in fact the way some girls will giggle and look down when young gentlemen pass them in the street is shocking, and perfectly disgusting. They ought to remember they are not servant-maids on their *Sunday out.* A schoolmistress is not doing her duty who does not check such unladylike conduct at once; and it is all nonsense for her to pretend that she does not see it. I know very well she sees it; but she is nervous, and afraid to interfere, lest the girls should simply deny it, and so place her at a disadvantage. We will recur to this subject at a future time.

"It was, alas! but to say farewell that Virginia Northbrook and Gilbert Mount-Dundas had met. Such was the hard fate of two who had known the sweet companionship of love for a period far too short; but destiny marches along with an unpitying stride, and we poor mortals are hurried along in the current. Tears stood in the maiden's eyes, and she would fain have fallen on her knees and besought him to remain; but he was of firmer mettle, and endeavoured to be cheerful, so that he might lessen the agony of their farewell.

"'Oh, my Gilbert!' she exclaimed, 'when shall I see you once more? Your path is clouded over with dangers; and, scan as I may the future, I see no prospect of your return. Do you know that beautiful song which says—

> 'Shall we walk no more in the wind and the rain,
> Till the sea gives up her dead?'

"He was deeply affected; but he endeavoured to conceal his grief with a smile.

"'What!' said he, in a humorous manner, 'when we meet I hope it won't be in wind and rain. We have had enough of both this spring.'

"She regarded him with surprise; for she saw not the worm that was corroding his heart under this mask of levity. And here it might be well to remark on the danger that is ever attendant on those who are ashamed of their emotions, and cloak them in a garb of indifference or mockery. Alas! what sad mistakes arise from this cause. The present writer is free to confess that he is acquainted with a gentleman who runs a great risk of being misunderstood by a hollow world through this inveterate habit. We believe that no truer-hearted gentleman exists than J—— D——, although he is not what a foolish school-girl would call an Adonis; but how often he perplexes his best friends by the frivolous manner in which he says the very opposite of the thing which he really intends. It is very annoying not to know when a person is serious. If you make a mistake, and treat as serious what is meant to be a joke, you look foolish, which is not gratifying even to the most Stoical-minded; whereas, on the other hand, you may treat as a joke something that is really serious, and offend the feelings of persons whom you love. No, youthful reader, if I may be bold enough to assume that such will scan these pages, candour and straightforward speech ought to be your motto. *Magna est veritas,* said the wise Roman.

"How sadly now shone the sun on the beautiful meadows of D——, and on the lordly spires of the C—— P——, as our two lovers turned to take a last adieu. He was going away into the world, to conquer fame and fortune for both ; she was about to be left behind, to nurse an aching heart.

"'Take this sixpence ; I have bored a hole in it,' observed Virginia.

"He clasped the coin to his breast and smothered it with a thousand kisses.

"'My beloved Virginia!' he cried, 'I will never part with it. It will remind me of you in distant lands, under the flaming skies of Africa, in the mighty swamps of America, and on the arid plains of Asia. Our friendship has been a brief one ; but, ah! how sweet!

Once more, farewell, Virginia! Be true to your vow!'

"He tore himself away; and the wretched girl was left alone. We must pursue her further adventures in our next chapter."

Here, then, for the present, end our quotations from Miss North's MS. work of fiction; it is necessary to get back to the real facts of the case. To begin with, the relations between Violet North and the young gentleman whom she met on the Dulwich Road were much less intimate, tender, and romantic than those which existed between the lofty souls of Virginia Northbrook and Gilbert Mount-Dundas. Miss Main's young ladies were not allowed to go wandering about the country unattended by any escort, however brightly the sun might be shining on the emerald meadows, and on the towers of the C—— P——. Those of them who were boarders as well as pupils were marched out in pairs, with Miss Main and Miss North at their head; and no one who saw them would have imagined for a moment that the tall and handsome young lady was only a schoolgirl. When they were allowed to go and see their friends, their friends had to send someone for them. But to this rule there was one exception, which seemed innocent and trifling enough. Miss Main knew of the intimacy between Violet North and the mother and uncle of little Amy Warrener; and she very warmly approved of it, for it promised to exercise a good influence over this incorrigible girl. Then Mr. Drummond's house was only about a dozen doors off; and when Miss Violet chose to go round and visit her friends in the afternoon, as she frequently did, was it necessary that they should be at the trouble of sending for her for such a short distance? Mr. Drummond himself invariably accompanied her back to the school, and on those evenings Miss Main found that she had less trouble with this dreadful pupil of hers.

So it came about that George Miller on one or two occasions had the good fortune to run against Miss North when she was actually walking out alone. On the first occasion she was just going into James Drummond's house, and she had turned round after knocking at the door. For a second the young man stopped, embarrassed as to what he should do; while she, looking rather amused, graciously and coolly bowed to him. He took off his hat; and, at this moment, as the door was opened, his doubt was resolved, for, with a frank smile to him, she disappeared.

On the next occasion, he caught her a few yards farther down the Grove, and made bold to address her. He said rather timidly—

"Won't you recognise our acquaintance, Miss North?"

"I do," she said, with her colour a bit heightened. "I bow to you when I see you. Isn't that enough?"

"If you were as anxious as I am to continue our acquaintance—" said he.

"I am not at all anxious," she said, rather proudly, "not at all anxious to continue it like this, anyway. You must get to know my friends if you wish to know me."

She was for moving on: but somehow he seemed to intercept her, and there was a great submission and entreaty in his downcast face.

"But how can I, Miss North? I have tried. How can I get an introduction to them?"

"How do I know?" she said; and then she bade him "Good afternoon," and passed on.

Her heart smote her for a moment. Was it right to treat a faithful friend so? But then she was not herself very sensitive to injury; she did not suppose she had mortally wounded him; and she speedily was rejoicing over the thought that the most faithful of friends ought to be put to the proof. If he was worth anything, he would bear wrong, he would overcome obstacles, he would do anything to secure and perfect this idyllic and Platonic acquaintanceship. If he was only an ordinary young man, he had better go away.

Mr. George Miller was only an ordinary young man; but he did not go away. He had not been suddenly inspired by any romantic attachment for the young lady whom he had met in the Dulwich Road; but he had been greatly struck by her good looks; he was rather anxious to know something more about her; and then—for he was but twenty-two—there was even a spice of adventure in the whole affair. She did not know how patiently and persistently he had strolled all about the neighbourhood in order to catch an occasional glimpse of her; and how many afternoons he had paced up and down beneath those large elms near the head of Camberwell Grove before he found out the hour when she generally paid her visit to Mr. Drummond's small household. It was some occupation for him; and he had none other at present; for his father was then looking out for some business a share in which he could purchase and present to his son in order to induce him to do something. Mr. George Miller was not averse to that proposal. He had grown tired of idling, riding, walking, and playing billiards all day, and going out in the evening to dull dinners at the houses of a particular clique of rich commercial people living about Sydenham Hill. It would be better, he thought, to go into the city like everybody else; and have a comfortable private room in the office, with cigars and sherry in it. Then he would have himself put up at one of the city clubs; and have a good place for luncheon and an afternoon game of pool; and make the acquaintance of a lot of blithe companions. He knew a good many city men already; they seemed to have an abundance of spirits and a good deal of time on their hands—from 1.30 onwards till it was time to catch the train and get home to dinner.

Meanwhile this little adventure with a remarkably pretty girl piqued his curiosity about her; and he was aware that, if he did succeed in making her acquaintance, the friendship of the daughter of so distinguished a man as Sir Acton North was worth having. He did not go much further than that in his speculations. He did not, as some imaginative youths would have done, plan out a romantic marriage. He had met, in an informal and curious way, a singularly handsome girl, whom he could not fail to admire;

and there were just those little obstacles in the way of gaining her friendship that made him all the more desirous to secure it. It does not often occur to a somewhat matter-of-fact young man of twenty-two, who has good looks, good health, and ample provision of money, that he should sit down and anxiously construct the horoscope of his own future. To-day is a fine day in spring, and the life-blood of youth runs merrily in the veins: to-morrow is with the gods.

Yet he was vexed and disappointed when he left her on this second occasion. She was, he thought, just a little too independent in manner and blunt of speech. He did not at all look at their relations from her point of view; if she had told him that he ought to be her knight-errant and prove himself worthy by great sacrifices he would scarcely have understood what she meant. Indeed, a consciousness began to dawn on him that the young lady was a school-girl only in name; and that there was a more definite character about her than is generally to be discovered in a young Miss who is busy with her Italian verbs. George Miller was in a bad humour all that evening; and on going to bed that night he vowed he would straightway set off for Wales next morning, and Miss Violet North might go hang for aught he cared.

In the morning, however, that wild resolution—although, indeed, there was more prudence in it than he suspected—was abandoned; and he somewhat listlessly went into town, to see if he could hunt up somebody who knew Sir Acton North personally. His inquiries had to be conducted very cautiously; and there was something of interest in the search. Eventually, too, that day he failed; and so, as he had to get back to Sydenham to dress for an early dinner, he thought he would go out to Denmark Hill station and walk across. He might get another glance of Violet North, and it was possible she might be in a better temper.

Well, he was going up Grove Lane when, turning the corner, he suddenly found himself in presence of Miss North and another lady. He felt suddenly guilty; he checked his first involuntary impulse to take off his hat; and he endeavoured to pass them without any visible recognition.

But that was not Violet North's way.

"Oh, Mr. Miller," she said, aloud, "how do you do?"

He paused in time to prevent Mrs. Warrener observing his effort to escape; he took off his hat, and rather nervously shook hands with her.

"Let me introduce you," said the young lady, boldly, "to Mrs. Warrener. Mr. Miller —Mrs. Warrener."

He received a very pleasant greeting from the little fair-haired woman, who liked the look of the young man.

"What a beautiful afternoon it is!" said he, hastily. "And how fine those fruit-trees look now. We deserve some good weather after such a winter. Do you—do you live up here, Mrs. Warrener?"

"Oh yes. You know the cottage with the thatched roof near the top of the Grove?" she said. She began to think that this young man was really handsome.

"Of course—everyone about here knows it. What a charming place; and the garden you must have behind! Well, don't let me hinder you; it is a beautiful evening for a walk. Good day, Miss North."

He ventured to shake hands with her; he bowed to Mrs. Warrener, and then he turned away—scarcely knowing what he had said or done.

"A friend of your father's, I suppose?" said Mrs. Warrener to Miss Violet as they passed on.

"N—no, not exactly," said the girl, looking down.

"Oh, I daresay some friends of yours know him."

"N—no, not exactly that, either."

Then she suddenly lifted her eyes, and said, frankly—

"Mrs. Warrener, I suppose you'll think me a most wicked creature; but—but it is better you should know; and I never saw that young man till the day I left school over that disturbance, you remember—and he knows no one I know—and I was never introduced to him by anybody."

Each sentence had been uttered with increasing desperation.

"Oh, Violet," her friend said, "how could you be so thoughtless—and worse than thoughtless? You have been concealing your acquaintance with this young man even from your best friends—I—I don't know what to say about it——"

"You may say about it anything you please—except that," said the girl, indignantly. "I deserve everything you can say about me—only don't say I concealed anything from you. There was nothing to conceal. I have only spoken a few words with him; and the last time I saw him I told him if he wanted our acquaintance to continue he must get to know either my father or some of my friends. There was nothing to conceal. I should be ashamed to conceal——"

At this point it seemed to occur to her that a self-convicted prisoner ought not to lecture the judge to whom he is appealing for a merciful judgment.

"Well, Mrs. Warrener," she said, in a humble tone, "I hope you won't think I tried to conceal anything of importance from you. I thought it would be all cleared up and made right when he got properly introduced. And just now, when he did not wish to compromise me, and would have passed without a word, I thought I would just tell you how matters stood, and so I stopped him. Was there any concealment in that?"

"But how did you meet him—where did you meet him?" said Mrs. Warrener, still too much astonished to be either angry or forgiving.

"I saw him on the road to the Crystal Palace," said Miss North. "I was attacked by a ferocious dog—such a ferocious dog, Mrs. Warrener! You've no idea how he flew at me! and Mr. Miller came and beat him and drove him away."

"Then you know his name?"

"Oh yes!" said Miss North, quite brightly. "I am sure you must have heard of Mr. George Miller, the great merchant and philanthropist, who builds churches, and gives large sums of money to charities?"

"I have heard of him," Mrs. Warrener admitted.

"Then that is his son!" said Violet, triumphantly.

"But you know, Violet, Mr. George Miller's philanthropy is no reason why you should have formed the acquaintanceship of his son in this manner. Where did you see him next?"

"At the Crystal Palace," said Violet, and the burden of her confessions seemed growing lighter. "I was very hungry. I had to go and get something to eat at the restaurant. I couldn't do anything else, could I? Well, the waiters weren't attending to me; and Mr. Miller was there; and he helped me to get something to eat. Was there any harm in that?"

Mrs. Warrener was not going to answer offhand; but as she felt that she almost stood in the light of a parent towards the girl, she was determined to know exactly how matters stood.

" Has he written to you, or have you written to him ? "

" Certainly not ! "

" He knows your name, and who you are ? "

" Yes."

So far the affair was all clear and open enough ; and yet Mrs. Warrener, who was not as nimble a reasoner as her brother, was puzzled. There was something wrong, but she did not know what. By this time they had got back to the house.

" Violet, just come in for a minute. James will take you down to the school by and by."

" Oh, Mrs. Warrener," said the girl, with sudden alarm, " I very much wish you not to say anything about all this to Mr. Drummond ! "

" Why not ? "

" I would much rather you said nothing ! "

" Well, I cannot promise that, Violet, but I will not speak of it to him just yet."

They entered the parlour, which was empty, and Violet sat down on a chair looking less bold and defiant than usual, while her friend, puzzled and perturbed, was evidently trying to find out what she should do.

"What I can't understand is this, Violet," she said, hitting by accident on the kernel of the whole matter. "What object was there in his or your wishing to continue an acquaintance so oddly begun? That is what I can't understand. Men often are of assistance in such trifles to ladies whom they don't know; but they do not seek to become friends on the strength of it. Why does he wish to know you, and why should you tell him to go and get some proper introduction to you?"

"I did not tell him anything of the kind," said Miss Violet, respectfully, but very proudly. "I told him that if he wished to speak to me in the future he must go and get some proper introduction. But do you think I asked him to come and see me? Certainly not. What is it to me?"

She was obviously much hurt.

"Then why should you continue this—

this—clandestine acquaintance, Violet?" Mrs. Warrener asked, timidly.

"There is no such thing as a clandestine acquaintance," the girl said, warmly. "But if Mr. Miller wishes to add another person to the circle of his acquaintance, am I to forbid him? Is there any harm in that? Don't you sometimes see people whom you would like to know? And then, if he could not at the time get anyone to introduce him to me in the usual way, his getting to know you was quite as good; and now, if you choose to do so, you can take away all the clandestine look from our acquaintance. You have seen him. You could ask him to call on you."

Mrs. Warrener seemed to shrink in dismay from this bold proposal. But before she could answer Violet North had hastily, and with some confusion, corrected herself.

"Of course," she said, quickly, "I don't wish you to ask him to call on you—not at all. But when you speak of our clandestine acquaintance, here is an easy way of making it not clandestine."

"No, Violet," her friend said, with unusual firmness, "I cannot do that. I could not assume such a responsibility. Before making such an acquaintance in this extremely singular way you ought to ask your mamma."

"Haven't got any," said Miss North, with a toss of her head.

"Or some one qualified to give their sanction."

"I don't know anyone so well as I know you," said the girl; and then she said, "but do you think I am begging of you to patronize that young man? I hope not. Mrs. Warrener, I think I had better go down now."

At this moment James Drummond made his appearance, an old brown wideawake on his head.

"Ah, well, Miss Violet; no more singing at Dixie's Land, eh? You have never been in Dixie's Land, I suppose. But were you ever in the Highlands? Have you ever seen the mountains and lochs of the West Highlands?"

"I have heard of them," Miss North said, coldly. She was very far from being pleased at the moment.

"Now do sit down for a moment till I open out this plan before you. That is better. Well, I think we shall take no less than two months' holiday this autumn, August and September, and I have my eye on a small but highly romantic cottage in the Highlands, connected with which is some little shooting and fishing; plenty of fishing, indeed, for there are a great many fish in the sea up there. Now, Miss Violet, do you think you could persuade your father and Miss Main to let you come with us part of the time? It must be very wretched for you spending your holidays every year at school."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Drummond," said Miss Violet, with great dignity. "It is very kind of you; you are always kind; but if my friends are not fit to be introduced into your house, then neither am I."

He stared in astonishment, and then he looked at his sister, whose pale and gentle face flushed up. Miss Violet sat calm and proud; she had been goaded into this declaration.

"What do you mean?" said he.

"Oh, James," cried his sister, "I thought Violet did not wish you to know; but now I will tell you, and I am sure you will say I am right. It is no disrespect I have for the young man. I liked his appearance very much—but——"

"What young man?"

Then the story had to be told; and if Miss North had been in a better temper she would have acknowledged that it was told with great fairness, gentleness, and consideration. James Drummond put his hands in his pockets and stretched out his long legs.

"Well, Violet," said he, in his quiet and kindly way, "I can understand how you should feel hurt, if you suppose for a moment that my sister thinks you wish us to ask that young man here for your sake. But you are quite wrong if you assume that to be the case. We know your pride and self-respect too much for that. On the other hand, might not this

Mr. Miller consider it rather strange if we asked him to come here to meet you? You see——"

"I don't wish anything of the kind," she said hastily. "Do you think I wish to meet him? What I wish is this—that you should not talk of clandestine acquaintanceship when I offer to introduce him to you, and when you can get to know him if you please."

He was too good-natured to meet the girl's impatience with a retort. He only said, in the same gentle fashion—

"Well, I think you have tumbled by accident into a very awkward position, Violet, if I must speak the truth, and I would strongly advise you to have nothing further to do with Mr. Miller, however amiable the young man may be, unless you should meet him at the house of one of your friends."

"I go to so many friends' houses!"

"How can you expect to go? You are at school: your whole attention should be taken up with your lessons."

"I thought even school-girls were allowed to have friends. And you know I am kept at school only to be out of the way."

She rose once more: the discussion was obviously profitless.

"I don't think I need trouble you to come down with me, Mr. Drummond," said she, with much lofty courtesy of manner.

"I am going with you, whether you consider it a trouble or not," said he, laughing.

She somewhat distantly bade Mrs. Warrener good-bye; and that fair-haired little woman was grieved that the girl should go away with harsh thoughts of her in her heart. As for Mr. Drummond, when he got outside, he was determined to charm away her disappointment, and began talking lightly and cheerfully to her, though she paid but little heed.

"Yes," said he, "you always disgust people by giving them good advice; but you wouldn't have us give you bad advice, Violet? Now, you will be a reasonable young lady; and by to-morrow morning you will see that we have acted all round in a highly decorous and proper fashion, and if you try to gain Miss Main's good-conduct prize this session I will ask her to put you down a hundred marks on account of certain circumstances that have come to my knowledge, though I can't reveal them. That is settled; is it not now? So your father has come back to London: I see he was in a deputation at the Home Office yesterday. How tired he must be of railways; or does he languish when he has to stop in town three days running? Do you know, I once heard of a boatman at Brighton—one of those short and stout men who pass their lives in leaning over the railings of the Parade—and somebody went and died and left him a public-house in the Clapham Road. You would think that was a great advance in life? I tell you he became the most miserable of men. He got no rest; he moved about uneasily; and at last, when the place was killing him, he happened to put up a wooden railing in front of the public-house just where the horses used to come and drink at the trough, and quite by accident he found it was a capital place to put his elbows on and lean over. I declare to you he hadn't lounged on that railing twenty minutes when all the old satisfaction with life returned to his face; and any day you'll see him lounging there now, looking at the horses drinking. That shows you what custom does, doesn't it?"

Of course, there was no such thing—no such boatman or public-house in the Clapham Road; but it was a peculiarity of this talker that when once he had imagined an anecdote he himself almost took it to be true. He did not mean to deceive his listener. If this thing had not happened, how did he know of it? The creations of his fancy took the place of actual experiences; his sister never could tell whether he had really seen certain things during his morning's walk, or only imagined them and stuck them in his memory all the same.

It was a fine, quiet evening up here among the green foliage of the spring. It was a grey twilight, with a scent of the lilacs in the cool air; and the mighty chestnut-trees, the spiked blossoms of which looked pale in the fading light, seemed to be holding these up as spectral lamps to light the coming dusk. It was still, a calm, peaceable evening; but even the unobservant Mr. Drummond could remark that his companion was not at all attuned to this gentle serenity. Her moody silence was ominous.

"You will come round and see us to-morrow afternoon?" said he.

"I am not sure," she said, with her hand on the open door.

"Now be a sensible girl, Violet, and believe me that we have given you good advice. Don't forget what I said to you; and come up to-morrow evening to show me that we are all still good friends."

So Mr. Drummond walked away up the hill again, whistling absently; one hand in his trousers pocket; his hat rather on the back of his head; and an unusual gravity of thoughtfulness in his face. Miss Violet, on the other hand, went indoors, and up to her own room. She was the only boarder in the place who had a room all to herself; but on this Sir Acton North had insisted.

She threw open the window, and sate down: far below her they had lit a street lamp, and there was a curious light shining on the lower branches of the chestnuts. The sound of one or two people walking in the distance seemed to increase the stillness of the night; and one would not have been surprised to find the first faint glimmer of a star in the darkening heavens.

Peace enough without; but a fierce fire of wrath within.

"They have done it now," she was saying to herself. "Yes, they have done it. I gave them the chance, and wished to be as proper in my conduct as anybody could be; but now they have driven me to something very different. I don't want to see him—I dare say I shall hate him when I see him; but I *will* see him—and I will meet him whenever he likes; and I will write letters to him till two in the morning; and if they won't let me make friends in the ordinary way, I will make friends for myself in some other way. And that is what they have done!"

So the wild winds of folly and anger and unreason blow us this way and that—that the gods may have their sport of us!

CHAPTER V.

SUBTERRANEAN FIRES.

A SUDDEN change came over the tone and style of Violet North's novel. It had opened in a gentle and idyllic mood, dealing with the aspirations of noble souls and the pathos of lovers' partings; it was now filled with gloom, revenge, and detestation of the world. The following brief extract may suffice to show the artist's second manner—and has other significance as well:

"When we bade farewell to Virginia Northbrook in a previous chapter she had been up to that moment supported by the companionship of one of the noblest of men; but now, when she turned away, with the wild tears glittering in her eyes, she felt, alas! what a bitter mockery the world was, and her young and ardent nature was shocked and wounded by the cruel selfishness of her fellow-creatures. All around her was gloom. No longer did the cheerful sun light up the emerald meadows of D——. Nature sympathised with her stricken heart; even the birds were silent, and stood respectfully aside to see this wretched girl pass. The landscape wore a sable garb, and the happy insects that flew about seemed to be crushed with the dread of an impending storm.

"For why should the truth be concealed? That cruel parting which we have described was wholly unnecessary; it was the result of malice and selfishness on the part of those who ought to have known better; they had determined to separate our two lovers; and their cunning wiles had succeeded. Alas! when will the heartless worldling learn that there is something nobler and higher than the love of mammon and the hypocritical gloss which they call, forsooth! respectability? Why should not two young hearts fulfil their destiny? Why should they be torn asunder and cast bleeding into an abyss of misery, where hope is extinguished, and the soul left a prey to the most horrible horrors?

"But the present writer must guard himself against being misunderstood in describing Virginia Northbrook's desolate condition. She was alone, and the cold world was against her; but did she succumb? No! Her spirit was of firmer mettle. It was a singular point in the character of our heroine that whereas, with kindness, she was as docile as a lamb—and *most grateful* to those who were kind to her—cruelty drove her into desperation. When she parted from Gilbert and took her way home to C—— G—— her soul was more dauntless than ever.

"'Do they think they have conquered me?' she cried aloud, while a wild smile broke over her features. 'No; they will learn that within this outward semblance of a girl there is the daring of a woman!'

Poor misguided creature, she was deceiving herself. She was no longer a woman—but a fiend! Despair and cruelty had driven her to this. Was it not sad to see this innocent brow plotting deadly schemes of revenge on those who had parted her from her lover, in deference to the idle prejudices of an indifferent world?

"Yes, reader; you will judge as to whether she was or was not justified; and, oh! I appeal to you to be merciful, and take into consideration what you were at her age. We will reserve for another chapter a description of the plot which Virginia invented, together with the manner in which she carried it out."

At this point of her imaginary life, there occurred a considerable hiatus; for her real life became more full of immediate and pressing interest. Violet North disposessed Virginia Northbrook. The details of the plot mentioned above must be put in, therefore, by another and less romantic hand.

First of all, this proud, wilful, impetuous and mischief-loving girl suddenly showed herself obedient, attentive to her school duties, and most clearly respectful and courteous to the chief mistress. Miss Main was at first puzzled and suspicious; then she was overjoyed.

"Perhaps," she said to the German master, "it is only to spite Miss Wolf that she means to take the good-conduct prize, as she took the French and German last term; but if she makes up her mind to it, she will do it."

Then all the girls understood that Violet North meant to have the good-conduct prize; and they, too, knew she must have it if she seriously meant to gain it.

Two or three days after this abrupt reformation, Miss Main said to the girl, in a kindly way,

"Miss North, why don't you go up to Mrs. Warrener's as you used to do? Amy has not told me they were from home."

"No, Miss Main," said the girl, with great respect, "they are at home. But—but when I go up there, it seems a pity I should have to trouble Mr. Drummond to come back again with me. It is such a short distance: he must think me very timid or foolish."

"Oh, I am sure," said the schoolmistress, "that need not bother you. The distance is very short indeed. You might easily run down here by yourself."

"Oh, thank you," said Miss North, very calmly. "That is very kind of you, Miss Main; for one does not like to be a trouble to one's friends."

There was less of calm respectfulness—there was, on the contrary, a proud and defiant determination—on her face when she went up stairs to her own room. There she sate down and wrote out three copies of the following mysterious announcement:

"*Violet.—Is G. M. ever about Champion Hill at five p.m.? V. would like to apologise for rudeness.*"

She must have contemplated beforehand sending these advertisements; for she was already supplied with postage-stamps for the purpose.

It was on the third day after this that Miss North met Mr. George Miller; and their place of meeting was the Champion Hill mentioned above.

"How odd you should have seen the advertisement!" said she, frankly going forward to him. There was no sort of embarrassment in her manner.

"What advertisement?" said he, amazed.

"Oh," she said, quickly altering her tone, "it was nothing—a mere trifle. I thought I had been rather rude to you; and I wished to apologise. So I put a line in the papers. Now I have apologised to you—"

"Yes?" said he, rather puzzled.

"Well, there's no more to be said,—is there?" she remarked.

"Do you mean that you wish to bid me good-bye?" said he, rather stiffly: he considered that this young lady's manner of treating him was just a trifle too dictatorial.

"Oh, I don't care," she said, indifferently. "What were you coming about here for, if you did not see the advertisement?"

"I thought I might see you."

She smiled demurely. "At the head of the school?"

"Any way. Even that would be better

than nothing," said he; for she was very pretty, and he lost his head for the moment.

"Well," she said, with a burst of good-nature, "since I'm not at the head of the school, I will walk down with you to the foot of Green Lane. I suppose you are going home?"

"Y—yes," said he, doubtfully. "I wanted to tell you something, if there was an opportunity."

"Pleasant, or not? If not, don't let us have it, please; I have enough of worry."

"You—worry?" said he, with a laugh. "You talk as if you were a woman of thirty. And, indeed, I think all this farce of keeping you a school-girl ought to be burst up. It is quite ridiculous. You ought to be at home, or in some one's house, where you would meet people and be allowed to make friends—instead of slipping out like this, and probably getting us both into trouble—"

"I know," she said, shortly. "What was it you were going to tell me?"

"I have found out a man I know in the

city who knows Mr. Drummond," said he, "and he proposes to introduce us to each other—in an accidental way, you understand. Now, will that satisfy you?"

"Satisfy me?" she said, turning her proud black eyes on him with an air of surprise. "Have I been anxious to be satisfied?"

"I did not say you were," said he, testily. "You seem bent on a quarrel."

"Oh no, I'm not," she answered, with one of those quick smiles that could disarm even the awful anger of an outraged schoolmistress. "But you must always bear in mind, if you wish to see me at all, that the wish is on your side. As for me—well, I have no objection."

"You are very proud."

"No; only frank."

"Well, about Mr. Drummond—won't that satisfy everybody? I have been introduced to that lady—what is her name?"

"Warrener."

"Then I shall make his acquaintance; and if he is a friendly sort of man, I will ask him to dine with me; and very likely he will do the same by me; and I am sure to meet you at his house. Now is that all right?"

"No, all wrong," she said, with a charming smile. "They won't have anything to do with you."

"Did you tell them?" said he, with sudden alarm.

"Oh yes," she remarked, speaking very distinctly. "I told them that I had accidentally made your acquaintance; that you seemed to wish to continue it; and that, if they chose, they could be friendly and take you under their charge."

"And what did they say?"

"They refused—too much responsibility."

"Then what do you mean to do?" said he.

"I?" she said, with a bright laugh. "I mean to walk down to the foot of Green Lane with you; and then go back to the school. Is not that good-nature enough for one day?"

"And after that—are we to consider our acquaintance at an end?"

"As you please," said she.

"Do you mean that you propose to continue this hide-and-seek way of meeting—this slinking round corners so as to avoid being caught? Of course, it is very romantic, but at the same time——"

"At the same time," said she, with a clear emphasis which rather startled him, "I mean to say a word to you that you must not forget. I cannot allow you to assume for a moment that I care a halfpenny whether I meet you or whether I don't. Do you think I wish to play at hide and seek? Now please don't talk like that again."

"Well," said he, rather humbly, "I no sooner propose one way of putting an end to this state of things than you immediately say it is of no use, and seem rather glad. Perhaps you could tell me another?"

"Oh dear yes," said she, with great cheerfulness. "Why should we ever meet again anywhere, or anyhow? Would not that solve the difficulty."

"Very well!" said he, driven to anger by her indifference and audacious light-heartedness. "It is better so. Good-bye!"

He held out his hand.

"And I am not to go down to the foot of the lane?" said she, with mock-heroic sadness. "Ah, well! good-bye!"

"You know perfectly," said he, relenting, "that I am anxious we should remain friends. And what is the use of your being so very—so very—independent?"

"Then I *am* to go down to the foot of the lane?" said she, with charming simplicity.

He burst out laughing.

"Well," said he, "I think you are the most wilful creature I ever met. But you will get cured of all these whims and airs of yours some day."

"And who will cure me pray?" said she, with sweet resignation.

"I don't know, but somebody will have to do it."

By this time they were going down the steep lane; the young green of the hawthorn hedge on each side of them shining in the clear spring sunlight; the low-lying meadows and trees of Dulwich far below them, and softened over with a silver-grey mist. In a few minutes more they would part at the foot of the hill; but there was no great premonitory sadness on her frank, young, handsome face.

"What is amusing you?" said he, noticing a sort of demure laugh under the beautiful dark eyelashes.

"Only the poor invention that men have," she said. "You are quite cast down because your scheme of being introduced to Mr. Drummond won't do. Why, a woman could get fifty schemes!"

"Then give me one?" said he.

"I am only a girl. Besides—how often must I tell you?—it is not my place to do so. But I was thinking to-day how easily I could meet you if I liked—not for a few minutes, but a long time—"

"Could you?" said he, eagerly. "Could you—could you get enough time to come for a long walk—or a drive?"

"I could get away for a whole day!" she

said, boldly; but she added quickly, "if I wished it."

"Then won't you wish it?" said he. "Look what a splendid drive we could have just now —the best time of the year—and I would try to get some lady I know to come for you—"

"Oh no, thank you," she said. "I have had enough of introductions, and relatives and friends, and asking obligations. If I went out for this whole day it would be to show them how little they can control me if I take it into my head not to be controlled. As for going with you, I think I would rather go with anybody else; only there would be no mischief in going with anybody else."

The declaration was frank, but not complimentary: the short time he had known this young lady had been enough to make him wish she had just a little less plainness of speech.

"Well, will you do it?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I will," she answered, with a sudden firmness of look. She had to recall

all her imaginary wrongs to nerve her for this decision.

"When?"

"Next Tuesday."

"And where shall I meet you?"

"Oh, you must drive up to Miss Main's for me, and come into the hall, and send a message."

He looked so horror-stricken that she nearly laughed; but she maintained a business-like air.

"Yes," she said, "is there anything more simple?"

"Surely you are joking! Do you mean to say that Miss Main would allow you to go out driving with me?"

"Yes, I do; what is more, she will probably offer you a glass of sherry and a biscuit before leaving. If you take the sherry, it will give you a headache."

"But I don't understand——"

"Of course not," she said, with good-natured indulgence. "I told you that gentlemen were poor in invention. But you will see how easily I can arrange all this. I thought of it just to show people how little they know the determination—but I needn't speak about that. Well, here we are at the foot of the hill—good-bye!"

She held out her hand carelessly.

"I must walk back with you."

"No; a compact's a compact."

"Then I am to bring a carriage for you next Tuesday morning, and come right up to the door, and ask for Miss North? Is that all?"

"Yes. Come about half-past eleven."

Mr. George Miller walked away in great perplexity. He had a notion that this wild girl had a great fondness for practical jokes. Might she not be awaiting him at the window, along with her schoolfellows, to receive him with jeers?

But then, he reflected, she was not likely to play any such too notorious prank just after her narrow escape from expulsion. He took it for granted that he was safe from ridicule—which is always a young man's first thought—

and then came the question as to the other risks he ran. This was no very safe project—to take a school-girl away for a day's drive, even though he could plead that she had made at least one effort to introduce him to her friends, and that he had made several to be introduced. On the other hand, was he to show cowardice where a girl was not afraid? He would have the finest pair of horses he could hire for that Tuesday morning!

As for her, she walked lightly and briskly up the hill—her fine figure giving her a freeness of step not common among school-girls—and made her way back to Miss Main's establishment. That patient lady took it for granted that her pupil had been round at Mr. Drummond's house.

Violet North went to her own room, sate down, and wrote as follows:—

"CAMBERWELL GROVE, *Thursday Evening.*

"MY DEAR PAPA,—I think it is very hard that your own daughter should know only by the newspapers of your return to town.

Cannot you come over to see me on Saturday? And my money is nearly all gone.—I remain, your loving daughter,

"VIOLET."

Sir Acton North was an exceedingly busy man, who had not much time for the cultivation of his domestic duties; but he liked this wild girl, and sometimes considered it rather a pity she should have no home but a boarding-school. Busy as he was, he took a run over to Camberwell on the Saturday morning, and had first of all a few minutes' interview with Miss Main. Miss Main treated this big, broad-shouldered, white-bearded man, who had kindly grey eyes, and something of a Yorkshire accent, with very great respect. Replying to his inquiries about Violet's conduct, she only remarked that of late it had been excellent; she made no mention of the recent disturbance. She was more anxious to direct Sir Acton's attention to the brilliant greens of the chestnuts, elms, and lilacs outside, to show him that a healthier site for a school could not have been chosen.

Then Miss Violet came into the room, and the schoolmistress retired.

"Well, girl," said her father, after kissing her, "aren't you ever going to stop growing?"

"I have had plenty of time to grow since I saw you last," she said, with an air which showed her father that she had not at least outgrown her cool frankness.

"And what do you want with me?"

"I suppose a girl must wish to see her father sometimes," she remarked, "when she cannot have the pleasure of admiring her stepmother."

"O Vi, Vi," he said, with a laugh which was not calculated to repel her free frankness, "you are as wicked as ever."

"Well, I haven't forgotten my fondness for you, Papa," she said, honestly, going forward and putting her arm round his neck; "so you must tell me all you've been doing, and all you're going to do."

"That will be too long a story," said he; "but I must tell you this—that before long I must go to Canada, and very likely I may have to stop nearly a year there."

Now what was it—some unnameable fear, some flash of a better instinct—which suddenly changed the expression of the girl's face, and made her cry out—

"Oh, Papa, couldn't you take me with you?"

"For a year?"

"For twenty years, so that I am with you. I hate England so!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child!" he said, good-humouredly, and releasing his neck from her arm. "Of course a girl must have fits of dulness at school; you'll get over these when you are a woman. So you want some more pocket-money? Is your last quarter's allowance run out already?"

She would not answer—she was proud and hurt. He would treat her as a child—he would not see she was earnest in that sudden cry to be taken away from England.

"Well, well," said he; "put this in your pipe and smoke it, Vi," and he gave her a 5*l.* note, with no thought of the imprudence of trusting such a sum of money to the discretion of an impetuous school-girl.

Somehow a change had come over the manner of the girl even in this short time. She had met him with that gay, defiant spirit that she commonly displayed towards persons whom she regarded with a special affection; then for a second or two she seemed to approach him with an unusual yearning of sentiment. Now she was proud, cold, matter-of-fact.

"Papa," she said, "will you excuse me for a moment? I wish to speak to Miss Main."

She left the room, and went and sought out Miss Main. The schoolmistress received her with a kindly look; she was pleased when Sir Acton North visited the school.

"Oh, Miss Main," said Violet, in an offhand way, "can you let me have a holiday next Tuesday?"

Now what could the schoolmistress possibly think of such a request but that it was one of the utmost innocence, which she was bound to accede to? Here was a girl visited by her father, who rarely came to town. What more natural than that he should propose to take the girl away for a day ?

"Certainly, Miss North," said the schoolmistress. "I suppose your papa will send for you ?"

"I think it is very likely Mr. George Miller will call for me," said Miss North, with a business-like air. "Of course you know Mr. George Miller, Miss Main ?"

"By reputation, undoubtedly. I wish there were more such as he in London."

"Well, they live not far from here ; so it is very likely he will be good enough to call for me. May I have the pleasure of introducing him to you, Miss Main ?"

"I should consider it an honour, Miss Violet," said the simple-minded schoolmistress ; and Miss North knew she was in high favour when she was called Miss Violet.

"Thank you very much," said Miss Violet ; and she was going back to her father, when she suddenly turned. "Oh, Miss Main, my papa has just given me some money ; and I do think the feather in my hat is getting a little shabby. Would you allow Elizabeth to go down with me to the shops on Monday forenoon. I wish to buy a few things."

"I will go down with you myself," said Miss Main, graciously.

"Oh, that will be so kind of you."

"Well, girl, what do you mean by keeping me here?" said her father when she returned. "Do you know I have to be at King's Cross by two o'clock?"

"I am very sorry," she said. "Must you go now?"

"Yes; good-bye, child. Mind you write to me when you want more money."

She kissed him, and bade him good-bye.

"I will see you out, Papa. Don't ask Miss Main to come: she is busy. Shall I see you before you go to Canada?"

"Of course, of course, of course! Ta-ta! Mind you behave yourself, Vi, and let me know when your pocket-money runs out."

After he had gone, his daughter had to return to her classes and lessons; and it was not till the evening she found herself with a little spare time on her hands. She felt unequal at the moment to continue her novel, for the details of the dark plot that had been invented by Virginia Northbrook wanted deep consideration. But she had something on her mind; and she came to the resolution to put that down on paper, and subsequently to slip it into the story whenever she got a chance. Here is the passage in question, written with some appearance of haste:

"Virginia Northbrook hated deception; she positively loathed and abominated it The present writer has never in all his life met with a human being who was as anxious as this girl to have a clear and shining candour illuminating her soul. And why? gentle reader, because she had inherited a heritage of pride—a fatal legacy, perhaps, but it was hers; and her ambition was to be able to look anyone in the face and say what she thought without concealment. Alas! we now find her compelled to stoop to subterfuges. Happiness had gone from her mind; horrid suspicion had built its nest there; the cold indifference of the world had stung her into a passion of revenge. What recked she of the mad course she was pursuing, when, with a shout of demoniacal laughter, she called out aloud in her own room 'Vive la bagatelle!' Let us withdraw for a time from this sad scene. The day may come when we may behold our heroine rescued from the unjust tyranny of heartless friends, and the honourableness of her heart's thoughts demonstrated to the light of day. But in the meantime—alas, poor worm!"

Violet North was so much affected by the sorrows of her heroine that she was almost like to cry over them; although, oddly enough, her sentimental grief seemed to wander back to her father's refusal to take her with him to Canada.

CHAPTER VI.

CRABBED AGE AND YOUTH.

"SARAH, we must not leave that girl to herself," said James Drummond to his sister. He had put aside his wide-awake, and was engaged in brushing a far from shiny hat. "She is offended with us; she has not been here for some days; we shall incur a great responsibility if we let her go her own way."

"We shall incur a great responsibility if we interfere," said his sister, and then she rebuked herself for the selfishness of her speech. "Yes, I must go down to the school and see her. I am sure I wish she would go into some convent, or some institution of that kind, where she would be under gentle moral teaching and proper discipline. She is untamed—a wild animal almost—with some fine qualities in her; and yet I don't know what is to become of her."

"A convent!" said Drummond, with a loud laugh. "She would turn the place into a pandemonium in a week. To think of it now! —wouldn't it be delightful? Violet North in a convent! Fancy the scare of the quiet creatures when they discovered they had amongst them a whole legion of demons—as many as you see in St. Antony's Temptation—I should like to have a peep into that convent occasionally if she was there. Well, you'll go down to her, Sarah. Don't preach at her: rather tell her not to make a fool of herself. Of course she is only hurt and proud; she cannot really care for this young—what's his name?"

"George Miller."

"And yet don't lecture her about the folly of a young girl falling in love, or the danger of it, and all that. She won't believe you—no girl will. You might as well expect to keep servants away from the sherry-decanter by sticking a POISON label on it. Don't try to frighten her; for there is nothing that girl will allow to frighten her."

Mr. Drummond put on his carefully-brushed but not brilliant hat, and went out into the warm sunlight of this May morning. From the height on which he stood he could see, in the far distance, a low-lying mist of brown. That was the smoke of London city, into which he was about to plunge—with no good grace.

And yet when his old college-chum Harding, who had forsaken the paths of learning and taken to tasting teas as a more profitable pursuit, happened to beg of him to come into the city and have lunch with him, he rarely refused. Harding lived in some remote corner of Hornsey; so the two friends had but seldom an opportunity of seeing each other in the evening. On this last occasion Harding had been specially urgent in his invitation—"A friend of mine wants to be introduced to you," he had added.

Drummond called at the office in Mincing Lane, and his short, stout, brown-bearded friend put on his hat and came out.

"Who is the man?" said Drummond carelessly, as they went along.

"Who wants to be introduced to you? Oh, a young fellow called Miller."

"George Miller?" said Drummond, suddenly stopping on the pavement, with a frown of vexation coming over his face.

"Yes. Do you know anything of him?" said Harding, with surprise.

"Yes; I do. Did he tell you why he wished to be introduced to me?"

"No, he didn't."

"Well, I'll tell you what, Harding, it's—it's d—d impertinent of this fellow—"

"My dear boy, what's the matter? You do know him? If you don't want to meet him, there's no reason why you should. We can have lunch elsewhere. He asked me in an off-hand way if I knew you—asked to be introduced, and so forth. But there is no compulsion."

"On second thoughts I will go with you," said Drummond, with sudden determination.

"I tell you, man, there is no compulsion. Let's go elsewhere."

"No, I want to be introduced to him."

"All right—the same as ever: flying round like a weathercock, jumping about like quicksilver."

They went into a spacious restaurant, where a large number of men, mostly with their hats on, were attacking large platefuls of rather watery beef and mutton. Harding was known to many of them; as he passed he encountered a running fire of pleasantries which he returned in kind. This was an ordeal which Drummond, who had frequently been with his friend to the place, regarded with a mild wonder. There was no one more ready than himself for fun, for raillery, for sarcasm even of a friendly sort; but this sort of ghastly wit, with no light or life in it, but only a crackling of dry bones, rather puzzled him. Then he noticed that his friend was a trifle embarrassed in replying to it; apparently Harding had not got quite acclimatised in the city. There was neither humour, nor drollery, nor epigram in this sort of banter; but only a trick of inversion, by which a man expressed his meaning by saying something directly the opposite—a patter, indeed, not much more intellectual than the jabbering of inarticulate apes. It should be added, however, that the young men were very young men.

"Miller hasn't come yet," said Harding. "What is the matter between you two?"

"Nothing: I never saw him. But I know why he wants to be introduced to me. What sort of a man is he?"

"Oh, well, he is a nice enough young fellow, who has unfortunately got too much money in prospect, and consequently does nothing. But now, I believe, he is going into business—his father means to buy him a partnership."

"But—but—what sort of fellow is he?" said Drummond, who had no interest in the young man's commercial prospects.

"Well, he is fairly educated, as things go—much better educated than the idle sons of rich business men ordinarily are. He sometimes rather gives himself airs, as to his gentlemanly appearance and instincts, and so forth, if strangers are too familiar with him in the billiard-room up stairs, where they generally have an afternoon pool going on. He is inclined to look down on us poor devils who are in commerce; but that is natural in the son of a business man. He is free with his money—that is to say, he would give you a gorgeous banquet if he asked you to dinner; but it would take a clever fellow to sharp him out of a sixpence, and you don't catch him lending sovereigns to those hangers-on about billiard-rooms who are always ready to borrow and never remember to pay. I think on the whole he is a good sort of fellow. I rather like him. You see, he is very young: and you can put up with a good deal in the way of crude opinion, and self-esteem, and all that, from a young man. . . . I suppose other people had a good deal to stand at our hands when we were of the same age."

"You don't think he would do anything mean or dishonourable?"

"I think his own good opinion of himself would guard against that," said Harding, with a laugh. "Self-esteem, and not any very high notion of morality, keeps many a man from picking a pocket."

"And he does nothing at all? He has no particular occupation or hobby?"

"No; I think he is an idle, careless, good-natured sort of fellow. Not at all a fool, you know—very shrewd and keen. But what in all the world are you so anxious to know all about George Miller for?"

Drummond did not answer; he seemed to have encountered some difficulty in the cutlet that was before him. At length he said, without raising his eyes from the plate—and just as if he were naturally continuing the conversation,—

"Well, Harding, I was thinking the most miserable people in this country are the lads and young men who are devoured by ambition—there are thousands and thousands of them, all hungering for the appreciation of the public, all anxious to have their stupendous abilities recognised at once. They cannot rest until their book is published; until they have been allowed to play Hamlet in a London theatre; until they have had a chance of convincing a jury and astonishing a judge. By Jove! if they only knew, wouldn't they be thankful for the obstacles that prevent their making fools of themselves! When they do rush into print prematurely, or get all their friends to witness their failure on the stage, what do they do but lay up in their memory something that will give them many a cold bath in after days! But I wonder which you should admire the more, the young fellow who is tortured with ambition, and would make a fool of himself if he were allowed, or the young fellow who is much more sensible—probably from a lack of imagination—and lives a happy and free and easy life? That is your friend Miller's case, isn't it? Now, don't you think that the young man who—"

There is no saying whither this speculation might not have led, had not Mr. Drummond been interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Miller himself. Mr. Drummond's quick, brilliant, observant eyes were instantly directed to the young man's face. It was a refined and handsome face. There was something pleasing in the modest blush which accompanied the simple ceremony of introduction. So far the first impression was distinctly favourable; but Drummond remained silent, grave, and watchful while the younger man chatted to Harding, and explained the reasons for his being late.

Then young Miller turned to Drummond, and rather timidly began to talk to him. As Drummond was never known to remain in the same mood for five minutes at a time, he was least of all likely to do so when that mood was one of a cautious and critical severity; so that almost directly Harding saw him, in response to some chance and modest remark of the young man, suddenly brighten up into a laugh, while he retorted with a joke. Mr. Miller was, indeed, relating some stories he had heard as to the tricks of the manufacturers of spurious wines, a subject on which he seemed to have acquired some knowledge. He went on to make a few remarks on the constituents of this or that wine—remarks diffidently made, but obviously based on accurate information. His talk interested Drummond, who, by the way, was profoundly ignorant on the matter. He neither knew nor particularly cared how a wine was produced, so long as it was pleasant and wholesome. If it was pleasant and proved to be wholesome, he drank it; if not, he left it alone. He would as soon have thought of inquiring into the constituents of this or any other wine as he would of inquiring into the application of the money he paid in taxes. He never knew for what purposes he was taxed, or who taxed him; but he paid the money, and was glad to be relieved from responsibility. He lacked the parochial mind altogether; but he was altogether grateful to the vestries, or boards of guardians, or whatever other and occult bodies took upon themselves the task of local government.

Now the great respect markedly paid to him by young Miller rather flattered Mr. Drummond, who began to be interested in the young man. Moreover, was he not in a position of advantage? He knew Miller's secret aim; Miller did not know that he knew it; if there was anything suspicious or underhand about the young man, he would have an excellent opportunity of finding it out. He was on the whole glad that he had resolved to come to the luncheon; he would not allow the young man to make use of the acquaintance unless he considered that advisable; while he was now in a better position to aid and counsel Violet North.

After luncheon they went up for a brief period to the smoking-room; and then Harding had to go back to his office.

"Mr. Drummond," said George Miller, rather shyly, "I believe you live over Denmark Hill way?"

"Yes; Camberwell Grove," said the elder man, amusing himself by watching the artless tricks of his companion's diplomacy.

"I live at Sydenham Hill. I—I was thinking—you know you were speaking of old books—well, my father has what is said to be a very good collection—it was left him by a friend who went to India some years ago. Now, if you have nothing better to do, would you—would you—come out with me now and have a look at them? You might stay and have a bit of dinner with me too. Unfortunately our people are all down at the Isle of Wight just now; but the servants will get us something. I—I wish you would."

Mr. Drummond could have smiled. The poor young man!—he was working away at his little plot, unconscious how the master mind beside him was looking down on all its innocent involutions. He would humour the youth.

"All right," said he, "I shall be very glad. Only I must send a telegram to my sister."

So these two oddly consorted people went away down to Sydenham to the big, gorgeous, solemn, and empty house; and young Miller was as anxious for his guest's comfort as if he had been an emperor. And how respectfully, too, he listened to the elder man's monologues and jerky witticisms, and chance remarks suggested by the various volumes. Much of it all was quite incomprehensible to him; but he did not cease to listen with great attention. Drummond came to the conclusion that Mr. Miller was a very ignorant young man, but decidedly intelligent, and laudably anxious to be instructed. Never had any prophet so humble a disciple.

He stayed to dinner too; and accepted with an amused condescension the young man's apologies for a banquet which was certainly varied and abundant enough. None of the wines seemed sufficiently good for so distinguished a visitor. The youthful host bitterly regretted he had not a better cigar to offer Mr. Drummond—the fact is, the box he produced had only cost 7*l.* 10*s.* the hundred. They went out on to the terrace to smoke; and sate down in easy chairs, among fragrant bushes, under a clear starlit sky. If the young man had any prayer or petition to present, was not this a favourable opportunity?

"I suppose those lights over there," said George Miller, looking across the black valley to a low hill where there were some points of yellow fire, "are about where you live?"

"Yes, I should think so," said Mr. Drummond.

"I—I happen to know a neighbour of yours."

"Oh, indeed," said his wily companion, with an apparent indifference, though he knew what the young man was after.

"At least not quite a neighbour, but a young lady at a boarding-school—I—I believe you know something of her—Miss North is her name—"

"Oh, yes, we know her," said Drummond, carelessly.

"Yes," said the other, with greater embarrassment, "so—so I have heard."

"You know her father, of course?" said Mr. Drummond, lightly—which was certainly not the remark that might have been expected to follow such a good dinner, such a good cigar, and so great an amount of attention.

"N—no, not exactly."

"Her friends then?"

Young Miller got out of his embarrassment by a bold plunge.

"The fact is," said he, "Mr. Drummond, I made her acquaintance in a curious way, and I have been anxious to get somebody who would do all the formal and society business of introducing us, don't you know; for she is a very nice girl indeed, and one likes to know such a sensible, such a frank, good-natured—"

"Oh, I see," said Drummond, apparently making a great discovery, "and so you got Harding to ask me to go into the city; and so you have asked me to come out here?"

There was no anger or impatience in his tone; he seemed only asking for information. The night concealed the colour that had fired up into the younger man's face.

"I hope you don't think it was impertinent of me," said he. "I am delighted to have made your acquaintance in any case—I hope you will believe that. I thought Miss North had probably mentioned my name to you."

He made no answer to that; he said it was a beautiful cool night, and rose to stretch his legs.

"To tell you the truth," stammered young Miller, "I thought that—that if you and I became friendly, I might have an opportunity, some time or other, of being introduced to her under your roof."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Drummond, coolly. "And with what purpose?"

"Well, one wishes to have a pleasant acquaintance—that is natural."

"I see," said Drummond, carefully breaking the white ash off his cigar.

George Miller waited for a second or two; surely this was a most unsatisfactory answer.

"You have not yet said—"

"Oh, whether I would ask you to meet Miss North at my house? Well, I see no harm in that. You only wish to make her acquaintance—there is no harm in that. But—but I will see about it."

"Oh, thank you."

Not very long after that Mr. Drummond took his leave, declining at the last moment half-a-dozen cigars as big as walking-sticks which George Miller declared to be necessary to his comfort on the way home. When he reached Camberwell Grove he said to his sister—

"Did you see Violet North this afternoon?"

"No," she said; "the Kennaways came over and stopped the whole day with me."

"Don't go just yet then. We must consider. I have met that young Miller, and a very decent young fellow he is, but much too young to be allowed to flirt with Violet North. Now if they were allowed to see each other occasionally, she is a shrewd enough girl to find out that he is rather a commonplace young man; and I think we ought to let them meet here."

"Oh, James, how dangerous!" cried his sister. "Only think what we may be accused of! Violet North will have money."

"That young fellow will have twenty times as much. However, I am sure the question will never arise. We will talk about this thing to-morrow."

Now "to-morrow" was Tuesday—that Tuesday on which Violet North had determined to put the whole world to defiance.

"Just my luck!" said young Miller to himself after Mr. Drummond had gone; "confound it! why was she in such a hurry? He would be willing to have us meet as friends at his house—that is quite certain—and everything would go smoothly enough; and now comes this pretty adventure of taking her away to Hampton, and there's no escape from that now. And a very nice mess we are likely to get into, if anybody sees us or finds it out, as somebody is sure to do."

CHAPTER VII.

A SUMMER DAY'S RIDE.

THE eventful morning arrived, and at an early hour Violet North went to the window of her small room, and, with rather an anxious heart, drew up the blind. Behold! all around her and beneath her a world of green foliage, lit up by the early sunshine; a million flashing diamonds of light on the glossy ivy-leaves of the old red wall; black shadows from the broad laurel-bushes falling on the brown earth below; the white and purple lilacs, the tremulous yellow blossoms of the laburnum, the upright, cream-hued minarets of the chestnut-trees all basking in the sun; and two tall poplars, rustling their leaves in the light wind, leading the eye up to the wonderful expanse of clear blue above, where there was not even a white flake of cloud. She was satisfied.

She heard some one passing her door; she went to it hurriedly, and one of the servants turned on the stair and regarded her.

"Elizabeth," said she, "here is a shilling for you; and you must at once run away down to Camberwell, and go to Mrs. Cooke's, the milliner's, and don't you come away until you've got my hat, done or undone. Now, do you understand, Elizabeth?"

"Lor, miss, they was to send it up at eight o'clock, and it is only half-past seven yet."

"But I am sure they won't send it. Don't waste time, Elizabeth, but go and do as I tell you; and don't be argued out of the shop."

When the two or three boarders came down to breakfast, they all knew that Violet North was going away for a holiday, and they were all anxious to see her costume. She was continually surprising them in that matter, for she had some skill in dressing herself, and yet many a poor girl, who faithfully copied this glass of fashion could not understand how these costumes seemed to suit no one so well as they suited Violet North. They could not even say that it was the larger pocket-money of a baronet's daughter which gave her greater latitude in adorning herself; for her dresses were devoid of every sort of ornament. They were the simplest of the simple; no tawdry flounces or eye-distracting bunches of ribbons; their only peculiarity was the studied tightness of their sleeves. But that which made Miss North's dresses seem to fit so gracefully was something outside and beyond the dressmaker's art: the workmanship not of any man or woman milliner, but of God.

She was in capital spirits. Anxious? Not a bit. There was more anxiety in the breast of a young man who, at that moment, was coming along the Dulwich Road in a carriage drawn by a pair of fine greys. He almost looked as if he were going to a wedding.

"Yes, Miss Main," said Violet North, going calmly to the window, "here is the carriage; and I see it is young Mr. Miller who has come for me. I would rather have introduced the father to you; but as it is, will you come down and see him?"

"Oh yes," said Miss Main, graciously.

The young man stood, hat in hand, in the parlour; and, if the truth must be told, with his heart for the moment throbbing rather quickly. He looked from the schoolmistress to Violet North as they both entered; the young lady was composed, smiling, and courteous.

"Let me introduce Mr. Miller to you, Miss Main," said she. "Your father is very well known, by reputation, to Miss Main, Mr. Miller; and she almost expected him to come for me this morning. But I suppose he had some other engagement."

"Y—yes," stammered the young man; and then he added hastily, "are you ready to go now, Miss North?"

He was desperately anxious to get out of the house; he knew not at what moment he might make a blunder. That there was some mystification about was evident from Miss Main's innocent helplessness in the matter.

"Good morning, Miss Main," said Miss North; "I dare say I shall be back about six."

When she stepped out into the sunlight, and saw the two grey horses before her, she could scarcely refrain from smiling—it was very like a runaway marriage. And so thought the girls up stairs, who were all at the window; and who, when they saw the young lady in grey and dark brown velvet—with her grey hat now adorned with a bold white feather—handed into the carriage, could not help admitting that a handsomer bride had never been taken to church. And was not he handsome, too—the slender, square-shouldered young man, with the straight nostrils and finely-cut mouth? They drove away in the clear sunshine; and the girls were of opinion that, if it were not a marriage, it ought to have been.

George Miller heaved a great sigh of relief; he had not been at all comfortable while in that room.

"How did you manage it?" said he.

"Oh," said she, with a revengeful triumph in her manner that he did not quite understand, "the easiest thing in the world! That dear good schoolmistress thinks we are going to some flower-show or other where your father, and my father, and everybody else's father, are all to be together. Coachman!"

The man turned round.

"Would you please go through this lane and up Grove Hill?"

She did not wish to pass in front of Mr. Drummond's house.

"And did you tell her all that?" said he.

"Not I. She inferred it all for herself. But never mind that, isn't it fine to be off for a holiday, and what a holiday too! I never saw this place looking so lovely."

They were driving along the crest of Champion Hill; and as there was a bank of black cloud all along the southern sky, against this dark background the wonderful light greens of the Spring foliage seemed to be interfused with a lambent sunshine. Here were young lime-trees, with slender and jet-black branches; tall and swaying poplars;

branching and picturesque elms; massive chestnuts and feathery birches; and now and again, looking into a bit of wood, they saw a strange green twilight produced by the sun beating on the canopy of foliage above. It was a Spring-day in look—the heavy purple in the south, the clear blue above, with glimpses through the lofty elms of sailing white clouds blown along by a western breeze!

"Where are we going?" said she, though, in point of fact, she did not care much; it was enough to be out in freedom, in the cool air and the clear sunshine.

"I thought of Hampton," said he, timidly. "The river is pretty there, and we must have luncheon."

"Are there not a good many Cockneys there?" said she, with an air of lofty criticism. "Don't they call it 'Appy 'Ampton'?"

"You'll scarcely find anybody there on a Tuesday," said he.

"Ah, you thought of that?"

"Yes."

"Thank you."

She was quite gracious; but somehow he was never sure that she was not joking. Was it not with some hidden sarcasm that this school-girl said "Thank you," with the high courtesy of an empress?

Suddenly she burst out laughing; and then he knew she was natural enough.

"If Miss Main should hear of this," she cried, "I do think she'll have a fit! It will be worth all the money to see her!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at in it," said he, "for to tell you the truth I don't see the necessity of your going on in this way."

She stared at him for a moment.

"Tell the man to stop," said she, with sudden decision. "I don't see the necessity, either, of our going on like this. I have had enough of the driving, and I can walk back."

"Now please don't be foolish," said he, in a low voice. "Why won't you wait until I explain? I said it was unnecessary, for there is no longer any reason why we should not meet each other just as ordinary people do. Mr. Drummond dined with me last night."

The announcement did not startle her as he had expected.

"I don't care," said she.

"But what is the use of risking trouble?"

"They goaded me into it," said she.

"Then do you mean to refuse?"

"Now," said she, "what is the use of arguing on such a morning? I said I would go with you for a nice drive; and here I am; and now you begin to talk about difficulties and disagreeable people. Why can't you let well alone?"

He was effectually silenced: and that was not the first time he had found himself unable to cope with the pronounced character of this mere school-girl. Of course, he did not like it. There was a frown on his handsome face; and he sat moody and silent. After a bit, she looked at him, and there was a mischievous look of amusement in her eyes.

"Have I offended you?" she said.

"No; but you have been rather rude," said he.

"Well, that is pretty language," said she, with a good-natured laugh, "to address to a young lady. By and by I shall find you following the example of Dr. Siedl. He called me a devil the other day."

"I don't wonder at it," said he; and this confession so tickled her, and pleased her, that she got into a fit of laughing, which eventually conquered his surliness. He could not help laughing too.

"Do you know what an exasperating person you are?" said he.

"Well," she candidly admitted, "one or two people have hinted as much to me; but I always considered it jealousy on their part—jealousy of my superior sweetness. I do assure you I consider myself very amiable. Of course, if people choose to be disagreeable——"

"That means, if people don't give you your own way in everything, you will take it."

"Well, there is something in that. However, let us say no more about it. I forgive you."

She settled herself comfortably in the carriage, the sunlight just catching the fine colour of her face, and the light breeze stirring ends and tatters of her masses of dark hair. If she was a runaway school-girl, there was little fear about her. She was criticising the appearance of the houses on Denmark Hill and Herne Hill as they drove past; she was calling attention to the pale purple blossoms of the wysteria hanging in front of the sunlit walls; or to the light, sunny, velvety green becoming visible on the upper side of the black and shelving branches of the cedars? What sort of people were they who had these houses. What was their income? Would Mr. Miller like to live there?

Then for a time they got away from the houses; and behold! here were beautiful green meadows yellowed over with kingcups, and hedges white with the may. Past some houses again, and into the long broad avenues of Clapham Park. Was not this Clapham Common, with its golden gorse, and gigantic birch-trees? They dip into another hollow, and rise again; and by and by they get well out into the country—the perpetual road of sunlit brown, the green fringe of hedge, the blue sky with its long flakes of white, and the musical, monotonous patter of the horses' feet.

"So you saw Mr. Drummond last night?" said Violet. "Well, what do you think of him? No—don't tell me; for unless you admired him very much—very much indeed—you and I should quarrel."

"I thought you were rather offended with him just now?" said George Miller, with some surprise.

"You can be offended with people you admire and like, cannot you?"

"Oh, I found him a very pleasant fellow—rather eccentric, you know—rather too much given to puzzling you about things—"

"He cannot help your not understanding him," said Miss Violet, innocently.

"As for that, I don't suppose he has all the wisdom in the world," said George Miller, who was only a young man, and quick to imagine rivalry. "And you must admit that he isn't very good looking."

"I dislike dolls," said Miss Violet; "I like men to be men—not dolls."

And now they had come—why, this easy, delightful travelling was like a dream!—to the high ground overlooking the far stretches of Wimbledon Common; and here indeed were two immense parallel plains, that of the fair blue sky above, and that of the black heath below, dotted here and there with yellow furze. Far away at the edge of the world there lay a ring of low-lying wooded country, that somehow seemed to suggest the mystic neighbourhood of the sea.

"What a fine scent the wind brings with it," said Miss Violet, "when it blows over the gorse! Why can't they bottle that instead of carnation, and peppermint, and such stuffs? Fancy getting a breath of country air into a London church. Do you like red hawthorn?"

"Yes, rather."

"I don't. It's too jammy. It looks as if it had been dipped red by a confectioner. I believe in the real white natural stuff."

"But the one is as natural as the other," said he.

"I am not going to argue," she retorted, with great condescension, "the weather is too fine."

With their youthful spirits and a joyous day, and a capital pair of horses, the time was passing pleasantly enough; but at this point their enjoyment was interrupted by a pitiful accident. They had got past the Robin Hood gate and were rolling along the valley. A woman was coming in the opposite direction with her two children—one in her arms, and one whom she had allowed to lag far behind. Now there was a cart laden with timber in the way, and as Miller's coachman drove to the right of the road to pass it, it unfortunately happened that the child, a little girl, stumbled at the edge of the pathway, and almost rolled against the carriage. She was not run over; but she struck her head against the hind wheel; and when Violet North, quick as lightning, opened the carriage door, jumped down, and caught up the child, blood was flowing from a slight scalp-wound. The girl, who had caught up the child long before the mother could reach it, and who did not know that the wound was not very dangerous, was frantic in her indignation.

"*You* a driver?" she said, with her eyes flashing. "Why didn't you stop your horses? You—you—you're not fit to—oh, my poor child, I think we've murdered you!"

She ran with the child back to the public-house; there—the mother not seeking to relieve her of her burden—she got water, and washed the wound, and tied it up as well as she could with linen they brought her. The coachman came in—he was explaining to the people that it was not his fault at all.

"Hold your peace!" she said.

Then she turned to the mother.

"Where do you live? Give me your address—I will come and see you—"

She quickly pulled out her purse. All this time her face was very pale and determined. George Miller interfered, and said—

"Here, my good woman, is a sovereign for you."

"She shall have ten sovereigns—she shall have twenty sovereigns!" the girl said, almost with a stamp of her foot, and with abundant tears rushing into her eyes. "Here, mother, is all the money I've got—I'm sorry we can do nothing but give you money. But I will come and see you—my father will come and see you; you go to a surgery when you get up to Wandsworth, and get a good doctor, and I'll pay him—now don't you forget; I will look after you."

"Thank you kindly, Miss," said the poor woman; and the men standing by, when the girl went out, said to each other, "There now, that's a real lady, that is; that's none o' your fine, stuck-up gentry as is too proud to step down from their carriages; that's a real lady, that is."

The carriage was outside, and the coachman again on his box. She went up to him.

"I beg your pardon," said she, distinctly. "I believe I was wrong. I don't think you could have helped it."

"Well, Miss, I don't think I could," said he. "But there's no great harm done—no bones broken. It'll only be a scar."

And so they drove on once more; but Mr. Miller was not at all pleased at the way he had been treated in that wayside public-house.

"How do you propose to get your father to go and see that woman? How will you explain your being here?"

"I don't mind that," she said.

"He could do no good. How much money did you give her?"

"Three sovereigns and some silver."

"So she has got over four pounds on account of that cut. I don't think she'd mind having the whole of her family treated in the same way."

"If you had your head laid open," she retorted, "I wonder how much your friends would think a proper compensation."

They drove on for some distance in silence.

"I think," said he, "we are having a fair amount of quarrelling for a single day."

"But that," she answered, with a charming smile, "is only to show what good friends we are. Of course, if we had met each other at a dinner party, and then at a ball, and then at a dinner party, we should be excessively polite to each other. Would you rather like that? Shall we try—from here to Hampton. Shall I begin? *I beg your pardon, my dear Mr. Miller, but would you have the goodness to tell me what o'clock it is?*"

The abrupt change of manner, and the air with which she made the inquiry, caused him to burst out laughing; and this effectually put both into a good humour, which lasted, with but few interruptions, throughout the rest of the day.

On through Kingston and over the high-arched bridge—on by the wall and trees of Bushey Park—past the entrance to Hampton Court Palace—underneath the shadow of some mighty trees--and then round to an open green, to the river, and to a big old-fashioned inn, its walls all hanging with the blossoms of the wysteria.

"Have you courage to have luncheon in the ordinary coffee-room?" said he—as if she lacked courage for anything.

"Certainly," she said. "I like to see people;

and I am not afraid of meeting any one I know. Oh, I say, if Miss Main could only see me now!"

When they went into the coffee-room they found there only two old maiden ladies, having bread and cheese and lemonade, a Frenchman and his wife, who was much older than himself, and an old gentleman who had fallen asleep in his chair. They were therefore fortunate in being able to get a table at one of the windows, so that they could turn from the dull red carpet and white curtains of the room to the great glowing world outside. Violet was very grave while luncheon was being ordered. She expressed her preference for this or that with a serious frankness. She had the air of a young woman on her bridal-trip, who is above all things determined to appear indifferent and at her ease, so as to make the waiter believe that she has been married from time immemorial.

"Then," said he, when the waiter was gone, "you will take a little champagne, won't you?"

"No, thank you," she said. "I like it, you know—especially if it is not too sweet—but I am not allowed to have anything more than a glass of sherry."

"Who can prevent you now?" he asked.

"My own self-respect," she said, with great suavity. "Do you think I would take advantage of Miss Main behind her back?"

Luncheon was put on the table; and yet they could not bear to have the window shut down. Indeed, there was not much wind blowing in; for now all the ominous black clouds in the south had cleared away; a clear blue sky shone over the still and fair landscape; the world lay in the peaceful light of a summer forenoon. Violet was most unmistakably hungry; but she gave her luncheon only a divided attention. She was continually turning to the sunlit picture outside, a soft and dreamy picture without sound. For there was the long blue sweep of the river—a pale steel-blue, here and there broken by a sharp line of white. Out in mid-stream the wind caught the surface, and ruffled it into a darker blue;

in under the soft green willows—which were glowing in the sunshine—there were smooth shadows of a cool, dark olive. On the one side these, willows and meadows; on the other, the ruddy road and corner by the Palace wall, with stately elms and chestnuts; in the far distance a softly wooded landscape all shimmering in the light. Could one catch the sound of that boat coming round the sweeping curve—the sunshine sparkling on the wet blades of the oars? There was a flock of ducks swimming in a compact body against the gentle current. Far overhead a rook—grown small by the height—was making his way homeward through the blue.

"And who are these?" she said, looking down on some six or eight young men who were crossing the road from the inn and making for the green banks by the side of the river. They were carrying bottles and glasses, and most of them had lit pipes or cigars.

"I should think they were the German fellows who were making such a noise up stairs."

"I don't call part-singing noise," she retorted. "I wish they had gone on. I knew every song they sung."

"I have no doubt you would like to have gone and helped them," he said, not very graciously.

"I could have done that too," she replied, simply. "My singing is not said to be lovely by critics—envious critics, you know—but I am mad about German songs. Now look at that one who has lain down on his back, with his hat over his face: why doesn't he start a song? He isn't smoking, like the others."

"Perhaps you would like to go and ask him?" he suggested.

"I would, really," she replied, quite innocently. "You don't know how fond I am of the German choruses. Don't you know '*Gaudeamus?*'——"

"If you would prefer to go and make the acquaintance of those gentlemen——"

"In the same manner I made yours?" she remarked.

"Do you mean that any one——" he was obviously getting annoyed again; and she interposed.

"There is nothing," she observed, "of gratitude in the human breast. Here have I run the risk of the most tremendous disgrace—worse than that, I suppose I shall have solitary confinement and bread and water for three months—all to give you the pleasure of my society for a few hours; and the return is that I am thwarted, crushed, argufied at every turn——"

"You are likely to be crushed," he said, laughing.

"Why, I only wanted them to sing some more songs to please you. I know the songs, every one of them, by heart. Why should I——Oh!"

She threw down her knife and fork, and clasped her hands together in delight.

"Don't you know what that is?"

One of the young fellows, lying stretched at full length on the grass, had been tapping time with his stick, on an empty bottle, to an imaginary tune. Then he had taken to whistling, which he suddenly abandoned in order to bawl out, in a strong, careless, deep bass voice,

"Was kommt dort von der Höh',
Was kommt dort von der Höh';"

and then the full chorus burst in upon him, not very musically, for some of the young men tried to keep their pipes in their mouths—

"Was kommt dort von der ledernen Höh',
Sa, sa! ledernen Höh',
Was kommt dort von der Höh'!"

"Oh, you nice young men!" cried Violet North. "Oh, you nice young men, don't stop!"

But they did stop; the foxy chorus had less novelty for them than for her; and in fact this young fellow had bawled out a line or two of it out of pure idleness and laziness. Some talking ensued; with here and there a faintly-heard burst of laughter. Suddenly the deep-voiced young man called out—

"Es zogen drei Bursche wohl über den Rhein,
Bei einer Frau Wirthin da kehrten sie ein,"

and there was another scramble for the chorus—

> "Bei einer Frau Wirthin da kehrten sie ein."

Everyone knows that Uhland's story of the three students is among the most pathetic of ballads; but what pathos was there possible to those stalwart young fellows with their lusty throats, their tobacco, and beer and wine? And yet the distance softened the sound—the beautiful air had its own message of sentiment with it—in the still sunshine and by the side of the cool river, the various voices seemed harmonious enough.

"Oh!" said Violet, "if they would only bestir themselves, and sing properly! I am sure they belong to some choral society. Why don't they sit up, and throw their nasty pipes into the river!"

Not they: they lay, and laughed, and sang snatches of chorus—idle as the summer day around them. Of course, they sang of the Lorelei, though there was here no gloomy and impending rock for the mystic maiden to sit on in the evening light while the soft tones of her harp lured the mariner to his fate. They sang a jödel song, the jödeler having all the air to himself; the others merely chanting a rhythmic and deep accompaniment, as is the fashion of the Swiss workmen when they are walking home in the evening. They devoted themselves to a couple of drinking songs, and then they got back to the region of sentiment with the Tyrolese lover's "Herzig's Schatzerl, lass dich herzen." Violet had been getting more and more impatient. She had finished her luncheon —or rather had neglected it for the singing, and the sunlight and the green foliage without. She had not been a talkative companion.

"Can't we go out now?" she said.

"I suppose you want to get nearer to those German fellows?" said he.

"Yes," she answered. "I cannot hear them very well at such a distance."

"Just as you like, then," said he, with no great warmth of assent. "Of course we shall have to come back here."

She went to get her shawl, and then the

two of them passed down the stairs together. Alas! what was that she heard as she got into the hall? She could only hear the air; but she knew the words they were singing—

> "Wohlauf, noch getrunken den funkelnden Wein!
> Ade nun, ihr Brüder, geschieden muss sein."

Why "Ade!" just as she was coming out to see and hear something more of them? Indeed, when she went out to the front steps, the tall youths had all got to their feet, and a waiter was bringing back empty glasses and bottles.

"They are going," she said, with some disappointment.

"Yes," said he, "did you think they were going to perform the part of Ethiopian serenaders the whole day?"

"What shall we do now?" she asked: her musicians gone, she was indifferent.

"Let us go in and see the gardens, and the fountains, and the fish. Then there is the maze, you know."

"I have heard of that," she said, with some grandeur. "That is the place that maid-servants like to lose themselves in, when they go out for a holiday. Thank you, we will do without the maze."

They went round and into the Palace, and behold! before them were the German youths, straying about the courts, and apparently having continual trouble with their double eye-glasses. They were in the main stalwart, straight-limbed, good-looking young fellows, though they wore very light trousers which were too short for them, and brilliant neckties which a milliner's girl would have coveted, and had had their heads, to all appearance, shaved on some recent occasion. But Miss North seemed to take but little interest now in the young men; she scarcely noticed them.

Among the few visitors, however, who were walking in the gardens behind the Palace, there were two whom she did particularly notice, and that in a very curious and wistful fashion. These were an old blind man, with long snow-white hair, and a small girl, probably his grand-child, who was leading him about, and chattering to him about all the things she saw. Violet North and her companion were sitting on a seat which was in the cool shadow of a black yew-tree; and from this darkened place they could well see the blazing gardens all around them and the bright figures that walked about in the sunshine. Wherever the old man and the child went, thither the eyes of Miss North followed them. How quiet the place was—the only sound that of the plashing of the fountains—the repose of the old-world garden seemed to invite to thinking. There was a sleepiness about those dark yews that flung their black shadows on the burning greensward. It was a comfort to the eyes that those yellow and scarlet flower-beds, that flamed in the sunlight, were remote; here, close at hand, there was but the grateful shadow, and the dark green under the branches, and the slumberous plashing of the waters.

"Do you see that little girl leading about the old man? She is describing to him everything she sees—the goldfishes in the pond, the butterflies—everything. Do you know what I should do if I were that girl, and if he were my father?"

He looked at her; he had never heard her speak in this tone before.

"I should tell him lies!" she said, with sudden bitterness. "I should go and tell him lies, and deceive him, and take advantage of his blindness. And he would believe me; for how could he suspect that I would be so mean?"

"I—I don't understand you," said he.

"Well," she said, with a careless gesture, "we have had our holiday; never mind."

And yet her eyes still followed the old man and the child.

"I wonder," she said, absently, "whether, if you break the confidence people have in you, you can ever restore it? Or is it all done for; and you can't go back?"

He looked at her once more: she was quietly crying.

"Violet!" said he, "what is the matter?"

"I am beginning to think what I have

done, that is all," she said, trying to conceal her tears; "and it is never to be undone now. And all for what?—a drive and a look at some flowers; and now I can never look my father in the face again, nor the only friends I have in the world, nor Miss Main, nor anybody."

"They—they needn't know," he said, hesitatingly.

"Don't I know myself?" she said, vehemently. "Can anything be worse than that? And I never was so mean as to deceive any one before—and—and—oh! I can't bear to think of it!"

"You must not think so much of all this," said he soothingly. "The fact is, you are very proud, and what annoys you wouldn't disturb anybody else. It was scarcely fair, I admit, to go and deceive those people, or rather let them deceive themselves; but after all, it was only a bit of fun——"

"Yes," she said, rapidly. "It was that at the time—it was that all to-day—but now that we have had our adventure comes the price that has to be paid for it. Do you know what I would give to have those last few days cut out of my life altogether? That is the worst of it: you cannot forget."

"It isn't so serious as all that," he pleaded.

"Not to you," she answered.

He certainly perceived that what delight was to come of this adventure had passed away; all the gay and careless audacity had fled from her manner; she seemed to be brooding over her self-humiliation. It was no use arguing with her; she was much too sharp in her replies for him. He began to think they might as well drive back to London.

She pulled out her watch.

"Could your man get me up to London by half-past five?"

"Certainly, if we start now."

"And would you mind leaving me anywhere in the neighbourhood of Euston Square? You can go home then, you know."

"But how about Miss Main?" said he, in surprise.

"Never mind her; I will arrange about that."

"All right," said he, "we must return to the inn at once."

It was a sultry afternoon as they drove back along the dusty highways to the great town they had left in the morning. A light brown haze had come over the sky; and the sun, that had got a coppery tinge, threw a curiously ruddy light on the highway, where the shadows of the trees were purple rather than grey. There was no wind now; the air seemed to choke one; the birds were hushed; everything promised thunder.

"You mean to go and see your father, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes," she said, firmly. "This at least I can do—I can go and confess to every one whom I have deceived, and ask their pardon—every one. What they will think of me afterwards—well, I cannot help that. I should have thought of that before undertaking this piece of folly."

"I don't see why you should bear all the blame, and take all the punishment," he said. "I will tell you what I will do, if you like:

what if I go up to your father's with you, and tell him the whole story ? I will if you like."

"You would?" she said, with her face brightening.

"Certainly."

"I like you for that," she said, frankly; "but of course I cannot allow it. You had nothing to do with it at all. It isn't the mere running off for a day that I regret—that was mere stupidity—but the horrid cheating—it is that I can't get over——"

"That is merely because you are so proud."

"It does not matter how or why it is, so long as it is there. I am what I am; and I hate myself—I shall continue to hate myself until I have confessed the whole thing, and left it with them to forgive me or not, as they please. And if they do, will they ever be able to forget? No, no: this piece of fun — of ridiculous nonsense—has done something that is not to be undone, I know that."

"Come, I say," he remonstrated, "you are really taking the thing too much to heart. Is there no sort of condoning a mistake in the world? Is everything you do to stick to you for ever? I think that would be uncommonly hard."

"Tell your man to go as fast as he can:" that was all the answer she made—and yet it was said wistfully, so that he took no offence.

In due course of time they got up into the hot air of London: the ominous sky was clearing, but the sultry closeness still remained. When they reached the neighbourhood of Euston Square she asked to be set down; and then she held out her hand, and bade him good-bye.

"When am I to see you again?" he asked, rather timidly.

"Perhaps never," she answered; and then she added, with a smile, "Don't ask me to make any more appointments at present. There has been enough mischief out of that."

"I mean to see you soon," said he, with some firmness; and then he drove away.

She walked up to the door of her father's house, and rang the bell. Her heart was beating violently.

"Is Sir Acton at home, George?"

"Yes, Miss," answered the man; and then she walked in and through the hall.

She found her father in a room the walls of which were almost covered with plans and maps, while the table was littered with all manner of papers. When he looked up it was clear that his mind was deeply engaged on some project, for he betrayed no surprise at finding her standing there.

"Well, Violet, well?" he said, absently. "I will see you at dinner: go away now, like a good girl."

If he was not surprised to find her there, he was sufficiently startled by what followed. Before he knew how it all happened, he found the girl down on her knees beside him, hiding her head in his lap, and crying wildly and bitterly. What could it all mean? He began to recollect that his daughter had not been expected to dinner.

"My girl, my girl, what is all this about?" said he.

She told him, with many sobs, the whole

story — every particular of it, and eagerly putting the whole blame on herself. To tell the truth, Sir Acton was not so very much shocked; but, then, the story told by herself would have sounded differently had it reached him as a rumour at second-hand.

"That is all, then?" said he. "You have just come back from that foolish excursion? Well, well, you did right to come to me. Just let me see what's to be done; but you did right to come to me."

Perhaps at the moment some notion flashed across his mind that he had not quite given the girl that measure of paternal advice and protection which was her due. Nor indeed was it easy for him to say offhand what he should do now; for his mind was still filled with particulars of a Canadian railway, and there was scarcely room for the case of this runaway school-girl.

"Bless my soul, now," said he, "I—I don't know what we had better do—"

"Oh, Papa!" she cried, with the beautiful dark eyes, still wet with tears, looking up imploringly to his face, "take me with you to Canada! I asked you on Saturday—and if you had said yes then, I should have been so happy. I want to go away from England—I hate England—I don't care how long you are away. Papa, won't you take me with you to Canada?"

He put his hand on her head; was there some look of her mother in those earnest, entreating eyes?

"I will do anything you really wish, Violet," he said hurriedly. "But you don't know what this means. I may be away longer than I expect at present—perhaps eighteen months or two years."

"Oh, Papa, that is just what I want—to be away for a long long time, or altogether—"

"But the travelling, Violet. We should have to be continually travelling immensely long distances, with little time for amusement and sight-seeing. And we should occasionally get into places where the hotel accommodation would doubtless frighten a London-bred young lady."

"It won't frighten me," she said; and there was a happy light shining through her tears: for had he not used the word "we"?

He got up and began to walk about the room; she stood for a minute or two irresolute, and then she went to him, and put her head in his bosom, so that he put his arms round her.

"Papa, I will be such a good companion to you—I will copy all your letters for you—and I will get up in the morning and see that the people have your breakfast for you—and I will take charge of all your clothes and your papers, and everything. And I don't want to go sight-seeing—I would far rather see railways, and coal-mines, and engine-houses — and I don't need any outfit, for I can wear the dresses I have — and if there is any great expense, Papa, you might give me 10*l.* a year less until you make it up—"

At this he burst out laughing; but it was rather a gasping sort of laugh; and there was just a trace of moisture in his eyes as he patted her head.

"I think we might scrape together the few pounds for your travelling without starving you," said he.

"Then you will let me go with you?" she cried, raising her head with a great delight shining in her face.

He nodded assent. Then she put her arms round his neck and pulled down his head, and said—

"I have something to whisper to you, Papa. It is that I love you; and that there is no other papa like you in the whole world."

"Ah, well," said he, when she had released him, "that being settled, what do you propose now, Miss Violet?"

"Oh," she said, "now I have confessed everything to you, and you have been so good to me, I am not so anxious about other people; but still I have to go and beg them to forgive me too—and I will go on my knees to them all if they wish; and then, Papa, I must tell Miss Main that I am going to Canada. When do we go, Papa?"

"Will three weeks hence be too soon for you?"

"Three days wouldn't."

"Then between a fortnight and three weeks."

She was so overjoyed and grateful that she gladly consented to stay to dinner—a telegram having been sent to Miss Main—and she even condescended to be civil to Lady North and to her rather ugly half-sisters. After dinner she was sent over to the school in her father's brougham.

She made her peace with Miss Main, though that lady was sore distressed to hear that she was about to leave the school and go to Canada. Then she went up to her own room.

She threw open the window; it had now begun to rain; and there were sweet, cool winds about. In the dim orange twilight of a solitary candle, she got out from her trunk the leaves of her MS. novel; and these she deliberately tore to pieces.

"You sham stuff, that is an end of you!" she seemed to say; "you must pack off along with plenty of other nonsense. I have done with that now; you were good enough as the amusement of a school-girl; the school-girl casts you aside when she steps into the life of A WOMAN."

CHAPTER VIII.

ENGLAND, FAREWELL!

"WHEN does she go?" asked James Drummond of his sister: he was rather moodily staring out of window.

"To-morrow they go down to Southampton; and I think they sail next day. All the school is in a terrible way about it; Amy has been having little fits of crying by herself these two or three days back. She says that the whole of the girls came and asked Violet for some little keepsake—and of course she would part with her head if it was asked of her—and now they mean to present her with some book or other, with their names written in it. Dear, dear me, what will our Amy do! I am glad she had sufficient sense not to accept Violet's watch—the notion of one girl coolly offering another a gold watch!"

"We shall miss her too," Mr. Drummond said; he was apparently not overjoyed at Violet North's approaching departure.

He turned impatiently from the window.

"Do you know," said he—with a look of anger which would have frightened anybody but his sister, who knew his ways—"do you know what mischief is likely to be done the girl by this two years' trip? Look at her now—a wild, headstrong, audacious school-girl just entering the period in which her character as a woman will be formed. And at this moment, instead of letting some soft womanly hand smooth down the angles of her character—instead of submitting her to all sorts of gentle influences, which would teach her something of the grace and sweetness of a woman—they carry her off among a mob of railway directors, with their harsh, mechanical ways, and their worship of money, and their loud and bragging self-importance. Why, the girl will come back to England, if ever she comes back, worse than ever——."

"Do you think her so very bad at present?"

Mrs. Warrener remonstrated, gently. "I thought you were very fond of her."

"And I am," he answered. "And there is a great deal about her that is to me intensely interesting, and even fascinating; while there is much that can only be tolerated in the hope that years will eradicate it. It was all very well to be amused by her rude frankness, her happy thoughtlessness, and that sort of romantic affectation she sometimes played with while she was a school-girl; but would you like to see all these things in the woman?"

"She must grow wiser as she grows older," his sister said, fighting a losing battle in defence of her friend.

"No doubt; but will she grow gentler, sweeter, more womanly? Her father, I dare say, thinks he is doing her a kindness; he is doing her a great injury."

"You don't like to part with her, James," his sister said, with a smile.

"Certainly I don't. I had some notion of asking her father to let her come and stay with us when she left school, and she was bound to leave it soon. If we could have got her with us to the Highlands, and kept her there for a couple of months, she would have got familiarised with us, and stayed on indefinitely."

Mrs. Warrener was quite as impulsively generous as her brother; but she had to do with housekeeping books and tradesmen's bills; and she ventured to hint that the addition of another member to their household would affect their expenditure to a certain degree. He would not hear of that. The frugal manner in which they lived surely left them some margin for acts of friendliness; and if Violet North were to come to live with them, she was not the sort of girl to expect or appreciate expensive living.

"But there is no use talking of it," he said, with a sigh. "When she comes back, we shall see what sort of woman she is."

"That is part of your regret," said his shrewd sister. "You were always interested in the girl—watching her, questioning her, studying her—and now, just as the study was about to reach its most interesting point, she is seized and carried off. Perhaps it will not turn out so badly for her after all—I am sure I hope so, for I cannot help loving the girl, though she has never been a good example to set before our little Amy."

"I think," said Drummond, suddenly, "I should like to go down to Southampton and see her off. The poorest emigrant has friends to go and bid him good-bye. I doubt whether she will have a single creature to shake hands with her the day after to-morrow."

"Won't Mr. Miller be there?" his sister suggested.

"No: when he learned that she had promised neither to see him nor to write to him before leaving, he very fairly said that he would not try to get her to do either. And it was very straightforward of that young fellow to go up to her father and ask his pardon. I think we must get him over to dinner in a day or two."

"Yes," said his sister, with a smile, "now they have taken Violet away from you, you can begin and dissect him."

"There is more commonplace material there," said Drummond, indifferently, as he went away to get a railway time-table.

And now the hour came at which Violet North had to leave that tall house in Camberwell Grove which had been her home for many a day; and there was her father's brougham at the door and a cab to take her small store of worldly possessions. The girls had begged leave to go out into the bit of front garden to see her off; she came down among them, and there was a great deal of hand-shaking, and kissing, and "Good-bye, Violet," going on. It was a trying moment. For these last two weeks she had been released from all tasks; and had already assumed the airs of a woman. She had been very dignified and gracious with her former companions—a little conscious of superiority, and proud of Miss Main's proffered society and counsel—and inclined at times to beg of this or that girl to be a little less unruly, and a little more mindful of the proper demeanour of a young lady, Now she was only Violet North again. Her attempt at playing the woman quite broke down; she was crying bitterly as she got into the carriage, where she huddled herself away ignominiously into a corner, and hid herself from the eyes of her companions who were waving their handkerchiefs after her.

But she was not crying when she stood on the white decks of the great steamer, and watched the last preparations being made for leaving England. It was a brilliant and beautiful forenoon, the sun scattering millions of diamonds on the slight ripples of the water, a fair blue sky overhead. She was proud, glad, impatient to be off: the new excitement had brought such a colour to her face and such a brightness to her eyes, that several of the passengers looked at this remarkably handsome girl and hoped she was not merely a visitor.

"I must be getting ashore now," said Mr. Drummond to her; and then he added, with the old friendly smile, "are you sure you have no other message than those you have given me?"

"Do you mean for Mr. Miller?" she asked, looking down; and then, as he did not answer, she continued, "Yes, I have. Tell him I am obliged to him for all the fun and mischief I had; but that is all over now. Oh, Mr. Drummond, isn't it fine to be able to cut off all that and get away quite free? I am so glad to be going! And when you see me again, I shall be quite a reformed character."

"Good-bye, Sir Acton. Good-bye, Violet: don't you forget to write to us."

Shyly, like a school-girl, she took his hand; and yet she held it for a moment, and her voice rather faltered as she spoke—

"Good-bye. You have been kind to me. Try not to—to think badly of me. And—and indeed you have been so kind to me!"

Two or three hours afterwards, all that Violet North could see of England was a long low line of blue, with here and there an indication of white; and now it seemed to her that she did not hate her native country at all. That is what distance does for us; the harsh and bitter features of this or that experience are slowly obliterated, and memory begins to look kindly on the past. England was to her no longer a place of squalid streets and noisy harbours, of smoke, and bustle, and din; but the fair old mother-country, proud and honourable, the beloved of many poets, the home to which the carrier-pigeon of the imagination was sure to return with swift wings from any other point of the earth. She had been glad to get away from England; yet already her heart yearned back to the old, joyous, mischievous life she had led, and it did not seem wretched at all. The new dignity of woman's estate did not wholly console her; for now she was crying just like any school-girl, and like a school-girl she would accept of no comfort in her misery.

CHAPTER IX.

CŒLUM NON ANIMUM.

SIR Acton North had early in life arrived at the conclusion that women were on the whole inexplicable creatures, who lived in a region of sentiment into which no man had ever entered, and who had all kinds of fancies and feelings which no man could possibly fathom. But because he could not understand these strange notions, did he consider them preposterous? Not at all. He took them on trust, for the very reason that he could not guess at their origin. He was most considerate towards those women with whom he had dealings; it was enough for him that they did believe so and so, and did feel this or that; he had long ago given up all notion of trying to comprehend their sentiments; and, in short, he simply accepted their reports. Take, for example, the relations between Violet North and her stepmother. Why, he asked himself, could not these two people live in the same house together and be decently civil to each other? The answer was that they were women—they had "sympathies," "antipathies," "secret repugnances," and all the rest of it, which were no doubt of great importance to themselves, but were a trifle unintelligible to others. He himself now, when a young man, had shared his rooms with this or that acquaintance, whose habits and opinions were very different from his own; but did they quarrel? No; they were two men; they had something else to think of than studying those niceties of manner and expression that seemed to make women either love each other or hate each other as the chance might be. Had he not had to work in daily association with many a man whose appearance, and dress, and habit of speech—in fact everything about him—betokened mingled coarseness and meanness; and yet when did either of them find the other's presence in a room an insupportable outrage on the feelings? Women were strange creatures; but they had to be leniently dealt with; for, after all, these peculiar fancies of theirs were doubtless of importance to themselves.

Sir Acton loyally carried out this theory, especially with regard to his wife and daughters. At the present moment he was hampering in a serious manner the performance of his duties in Canada, merely because a school-girl had besought him to take her away from England for eighteen months or a couple of years. He did not understand why Violet should hate England, or be so anxious to leave it. He knew she had committed some school-girl indiscretions; but surely every school-girl did not get into such a passion of remorse when found out in a fault? However, here was his eldest daughter crying, sobbing, imploring to be taken with him to Canada; and so he took her.

Nor was he surprised that the moment

she left England she should begin to be very sorrowful and filled with a longing regret. That was only another instance of the unintelligible working of the feminine emotions. He cheered her as well as he could; and tried to interest her in the details of the voyage. Fortunately they had a fine passage; there were some agreeable people on board; and Miss North speedily regained her ordinary gaiety of spirits. When they landed on the shores of what was to her a new and wonderful country, moreover, she was full of high expectation. She proved, as she had promised to be, an excellent travelling companion. She was equal to any amount of fatigue—indeed, the girl had a constitution as tough as his own. She made light of delays and inconveniences; she saw everything that was tolerably pleasant through rose-coloured spectacles; such things as were beautiful or delightful provoked an admiration which pleased her father, because it was obviously flavoured with gratitude. Then there was something on the other side. They were not always inspecting valleys, surveying plains, and studying maps. There were pauses of social enjoyment; and Sir Acton North, in taking about with him his daughter, was not at all averse to showing some of his old acquaintances what an English girl was like. And among those families were there not a few young men who secretly admired and longed—who wondered whether it was not possible to fascinate, delay, and subsequently capture this beautiful bird of passage? Doubtless; but their wiles were of no avail. She was too busy, eager, and happy—too gay and self-reliant of heart—to attend to imploring glances and sighs. If she had, in resolving to become a woman, thrown aside much of the fractious impatience and rude frankness of her school-girl days, she still retained a gracious dignity—a certain lofty audacity of pride in herself—that would not at all permit that she should be trifled with. Those young gentlemen were not aware that she had just been released from school, or doubtless they would have been sufficiently surprised by the fashion in which a school-girl could assume all the self-reliant dignity of a woman, keeping them, more especially, in their proper place.

But even Sir Acton's placid concurrence in the vagaries of the feminine nature would have been startled if he had known the sentiment that was gradually growing up during all this time in his daughter's heart. It had been symbolised in a measure by the manner of her leaving England. She was glad to get away from the squalor, the din, the bustle of the seaport-town from which they sailed; but by and by all those objectionable things were forgotten, and, looking back, she only saw her own beautiful England. So now all the harsh aspects and humiliating circumstances of the old life she had cried to get away from were forgotten; and she looked back to the small circle of friends she had known with a tender and wistful regret. She grew to think there was no place in all the world so quiet, and homely, and beautiful as that little garden behind

James Drummond's house in Camberwell Grove. The people around her did all they could to please her and amuse her; but they were only acquaintances; her friends were back in that old and yet never-forgotten time which was becoming so dear to her. She had indeed succeeded in putting a great chasm between her and that bygone time. England was not half so far away from her as were her school-girl days. But did she cease to care for the old time, and for the friends she knew then? Not much. Both had grown dearer to her, as England had grown dearer to her; and many a night, when a great lambent planet was shining in the northern sky, she looked up and her heart said to it, "Ah, how happy you must be; for you are able to look across the waters and see my England!"

And as for him who had been her companion in that adventure which was the main cause of her exile? Well, he underwent transformation too. First of all, she was considerably ashamed of the whole affair; and did not like to think of him. Then she began to look upon that episode in a sort of half-humorous way; she would smile to herself in reflecting on her own folly; and perhaps wonder what he was now thinking of it all. But as the days, and the weeks, and the months went by—as the continual succession of actual lakes, and mountains, and pine-woods made England look more and more visionary and remote—so that little adventure came to be regarded as the only bit of romance that had ever occurred to her, and she thought of the bright May-day as belonging to a past spring-time not likely to be recalled in the life of a woman. He, too; had he not been made the victim of her petulant caprice? Had he not manfully gone and taken the blame of that for which he was in nowise responsible? And did he sometimes think of her now?

For a long time she never mentioned him in her letters. One day, she put a timid little postscript at the end of the last page —she was writing to Mrs. Warrener—and this was what she asked, in a half comical way:

"Do you ever see my youthful sweetheart now? What a long time it seems since we made fools of ourselves! I suppose he has quite forgotten me by this time; and as for me, I can scarcely remember what he was like, except that he had wavy light-brown hair, which I thought very lovely and quite Adonis-looking. Sometimes I dream that I am caught in some awful piece of mischief, and Miss Main is setting me three pages of *Télémaque* to write out."

It was a casual and apparently a careless question; but somehow the answer was looked for. And that came from Mr. Drummond himself, who described in his rambling, odd, jocular fashion, the evening which Mr. George Miller had spent at his house, the very night before. The girl dwelt long over that pleasant little picture; until she was more ready than ever to cry out, "How very happy the stars must be, because they can see my England!"

CHAPTER X.

A MESSAGE HOME.

ENGLAND, meanwhile, had not remained stationary merely because Violet North had left it. The little world in which she had lived still wagged on in its accustomed way, bringing all manner of changes, big and little, to the people she had known.

First of all, Mr. Drummond had finally completed his scheme for a great work to which he meant to devote the following winter. He had developed many such schemes before; and he had always been looking forward to a winter's serious work; but somehow the big project generally dwindled down to the dimensions of a magazine article, and even that was sometimes too whimsical and perverse for the most patient of editors. However, this time he was resolved to get the thing done; and so he went to a publisher whom he knew, carrying with him a few slips containing the outlines of his projected book. The publisher's face grew more and more puzzled as he looked at the following title and table of contents:—

On a Proposal to Whitewash the Outside of Westminster Abbey.

Sub-Head 1.—*The General Properties and History of Whitewash.*

Section I. On Expiatory Punishments.

Section II. Remarks on Modern Estimates of Judas Iscariot, Nero, Henry VIII., and Torquemada.

Section III. Whitecross-street.

Section IV. On those retrospective marriage laws which clear the character of illegitimate children.

Section V. On tombstone inscriptions.

Sub-Head 2.—The Interior of Westminster Abbey.

Section I. On Exploded Reputations.

Section II. Three questions propounded: (1) Is it possible for the disembodied spirit to be present at the funeral of his own body? (2) Is it possible for a disembodied spirit to blush? (3) Is it probable that, on several occasions, disembodied spirits may have been present in Westminster Abbey, and blushed to find their own bodies being buried there?

Section III. On the Dean of Westminster as a collector of curiosities.

Section IV. On the possibility of a Dean of Westminster becoming possessed of the evil eye, and therefore able to secure celebrities for his collection before the proper time.

Section V. A proposal for a Junior Westminster Abbey: the occupants of the present Abbey to retire by rotation: vacancies to be filled up from the Junior.

The publisher got no further than that. His brain was in a whirl, and he sought safety by getting back to the initial point of his perplexity.

"God bless my soul!" he cried, "what do you mean, Drummond? To whitewash Westminster Abbey? Why, the public wouldn't hear of such a thing. It would be an outrage—a barbarism—I never heard of such a notion!"

A quick, strange, bewildered look came into Drummond's eyes; he looked at the publisher in a puzzled way.

"You don't—see—that it is a joke," said he.

"A joke! Is all this meant to be a joke? Do you think the public would read a joke extending to five hundred pages?"

"Confound them, they read many a five hundred pages without any joke in them at all," said Drummond.

"My dear fellow!" said the publisher, with a friendly and condescending smile, "why, God bless my soul! who could be amusing for five hundred pages?"

"There are many folks amusing all their life long," retorted Drummond, though he was rather disappointed. "What they are after, goodness only knows. Perhaps they have the fun taken out of them *then.*"

"Take my advice, Drummond," said his friendly adviser. "Don't waste your time over this. If it were a real piece of history, now, you know—something nice and picturesque about the Abbey itself, and the great heroes there—with a good dash of patriotism, and religious feeling, and that kind of thing—then the public would look at it. But a joke! and a joke about Westminster Abbey of all places in the world!"

"I meant no disrespect to the Abbey, I am sure," said Drummond, humbly.

"No, no," said his friend, "don't you waste your time on that."

James Drummond went home crest-fallen to his sister: he was sure of sympathy and admiration from his unfailing audience of one.

"They won't have it, Sarah."

"And why?"

"Because the public wouldn't see it was meant as a joke; and then, if they did, they would take it as an insult. By heavens!" he added savagely, "I wish all the publishers were buried in the Abbey, and that I had to write an inscription over their common tomb!"

"What would you say?"

He stood uncertain for a moment.

"I think," he said, slowly, "I cannot do better than go and compose that inscription. As a great favour, I will show it to any publisher who makes the application. It is not everyone who can tell before his death what his tombstone is going to say after that event. Sarah, don't come in and disturb me until I have finished my eulogium on the departed race of publishers."

So that was all that came at the moment of Mr. Drummond's great project; and Mrs. Warrener was once more defeated in her desire to be able to write out to Violet North that her friend had become famous. For, of course, whatever Mr. Drummond's own notions on the subject were, his sister was convinced that he was failing in his duty so long as he did not achieve a great reputation; and of his capacity to do that she had no doubt whatever.

Events had moved in a more marked way with Mr. George Miller—"Young Miller," as Drummond now familiarly called him. In the first place his father had bought for him a comfortable partnership which did not make too severe a call upon his time; and the young gentleman having thus started in the world for himself, preferred to leave the paternal roof and take up his lodging in Half Moon Street, where he had a couple of sufficiently pleasant rooms. Then he had gained admittance to a small but very gorgeous club in Piccadilly, the mere stair-case of which would have justified his paying double the entrance fee demanded. This, about the most westerly in position of the well-known clubs, was about the most easterly in the character of its members. It used to be said that the lost tribes of Israel had suddenly turned up in that imposing building, and that, as a consequence, the steward had to excise bacon from his daily bill of fare; but these rude jokes came with an ill grace from the young gentlemen of the Stock Exchange whose ancestry was much more thoroughly missing than ever the lost tribes had been. Of course these two classes did not make up the membership of the club. Far from it. There was just as large a proportion as in other clubs of gentlemen who could not have earned a penny (except at pool) to save their lives—if that could fairly be regarded as an inducement; gentlemen whose ancestors had condescended to do nothing for five centuries, and who were in consequence regarded with great respect. There were lawyers, doctors, bill-discounters, clergymen—in short, all the ordinary constituents of a non-political club; and there were one or two authors, who were occasionally asked at the last moment to join this or that little dinner-party, because they were devilish amusing fellows, and good for no end of jokes, you know.

Now Mr. George Miller had become very friendly with James Drummond; and on several occasions the latter had been induced to dine at this club—let us call it the Judæum for distinction's sake—with his newly-made acquaintance. Mr. Drummond, during these evenings, grew more and more to wonder at the extraordinary knowledge of the world which this young man had picked up. It was not a knowledge of human nature; but a knowledge of the facts and circumstances of the life around him—of the petty ambitions of this man, of how the next made his money, of the fashion in which the other impecunious person contrived to make both ends meet by shifting his lodgings from time to time. Mr. Drummond perceived that young Miller was an ingenuous youth; but how had he picked up this familiarity with the ways of the world, which after all had its value as a species of education? Mr. Drummond was well content to sit and listen to the young man. What he heard did not edify him; but it interested him in a way. Moreover there was no arrogance of superior knowledge about the young man. On the contrary, he was still the humble scholar and disciple of this whimsical master; and was greatly pleased when Gamaliel invited him to spend an evening in the solitudes of that southern mountain, where he metaphorically sate at the feet of the teacher, and listened with much apparent interest to monologues, not one-fifth part of which he could in anywise understand.

They were an oddly assorted couple of friends. But if Mr. Miller found himself at a marked disadvantage while his teacher was idly roaming over the fields of philosophy, art, and letters, culling a flower here and there, and expounding its hidden virtues, he, on the other hand, was much more at home than Drummond was in railway-stations, restaurants, hansom cabs, and what not. Young Miller "knew his way about," as the saying is. When he paid his money he got his money's worth. He smiled blandly at the pretences of begging impostors; he was not born yesterday. If there was a crush at a train, Mr. Drummond would give way to the noisy and blustering person who hustled past him—would stand aside, indeed, in mild wonder over the man's manners: but young Miller did not see the fun of being imposed on in that fashion. His elbows were as sharp as any man's; his head as good a battering-ram as another's; if it cost him twenty hats he would not be deprived of his just rights.

One evening they were dining together in a quiet way at the Judæum; while they were talking, the waiter had opened a bottle of champagne, and filled their glasses. The moment Miller tasted the wine, he perceived that it was wholly different from that he had ordered, and summoning the waiter, he asked him what the wine was. The man remembered the order, and saw his mistake in a moment—he could only look in a helpless fashion at the destroyed bottle.

"Take it away and bring what I ordered."

When he had gone Mr. Miller said,

"Now that will teach that fellow to be a little more careful; that's eight shillings he has lost by his blunder."

The waiter, not looking very radiant, came back with the proper wine, and the dinner went on.

"What wages will that man have?" said Drummond—he, too, seemed a little depressed.

"I don't know; probably a guinea a week, and his board and clothes."

"He may have a wife to keep perhaps?"

"Possibly he may."

"Perhaps she may have children and a small household to support on that guinea a week?"

"Very likely."

Drummond remained silent for some little time; he was not getting on well with his dinner. At last, he fairly flung down his knife and fork, and pushed away his plate.

"Miller, this dinner sticks in my throat!"

The younger man looked up amazed.

"What is it?"

"I can't sit eating and drinking here, with that unfortunate devil robbed of more than a third of his week's earnings—I can't do it——"

"Is it the waiter? Why, my dear fellow, I will put that right in a moment."

He would do anything to please his friend, of course. He called the waiter and told him to have the rejected bottle of wine added to the dinner-bill; the man went away with more gratitude in his face than he dared express in words.

"But it is very wrong," said young Miller, gravely. "You see you don't understand these things, Drummond—you don't like to have men treated like machines—and yet if you let fine feelings come into the management of a club, you'll simply have bad, and careless, and even impertinent servants. There's nothing like letting them suffer the consequences of their own mistakes. Haven't we to do the same? And who pities us? Now isn't there common sense in that?"

"Oh, yes, there's a deal of common sense in that," said Drummond, in a dry and serious tone which always irritated his companion, who never could tell whether it did not conceal some trace of sarcasm.

"My dear fellow," continued Miller—he was pleased to be able to play Gamaliel himself at times—"the moment you break in on strict discipline it is all over with the servants in a club. I remember a pretty instance of what follows from familiarity and friendly feeling, and that kind of thing. We had an Oxford parson here—one of the new school, you know—felt hat, thick walking-stick, long tramps, a hail-fellow-well-met sort of fellow, you know, and a devil to smoke pipes—and he used to interest himself in the affairs of the waiters, and chat with them about their wives and families. Well, look here. He was in the smoking-room one evening——"

The face of Mr. Miller had grown properly solemn; he was really anxious to impress on his friend the true principles of governing waiters.

"He was in the smoking-room one evening, and we were all round the fire, and he wanted a light. A waiter had brought up some things —I suppose he was one of his pets—and he asked this waiter to bring him a light. There were no matches on the table; and what does this fellow do but take out a match-box of his own, get hold of a wax-match, strike it on the heel of his boot—*on the heel of his boot*—and hand it over to the parson!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Drummond, with an awe-struck face. "And what happened? Did the earth open and swallow up that fearful man?"

"Oh, you think it is a joke," said young Miller, rather nettled, "I don't, anyway. If one of my father's servants did that to me, I can tell you he wouldn't be three minutes in the house. And no servant would do it, mind you, if he hadn't been made careless and cheeky by over-familiarity. By the way, Lady North is an uncommon good one to look after her servants."

"Lady North?" said Drummond, with a stare.

"Yes," said Mr. Miller, with complacency. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, I fancy, how I ran across them at a picnic at Twickenham, and the girls are very plain, don't you see, and nobody was attending to them much, and so I became very good friends with them, mother and all."

"Was this another of your deeply laid schemes?" said Drummond, with a smile;

thinking of the ingenuous way in which the young man had made his own acquaintance.

"No, it was not, upon my honour," said Miller. "I knew they were to be there; and probably I should not have gone if I had not known; but the invitation was sent to me without any asking or arrangement on my part, and Lady North is not a bad sort of woman. I dined with the family and one or two friends the other evening. She is rather cut and dried, you know, and she has remarkably sharp grey eyes—by Jove, I can tell you, the servants won't have much of a fling in that house. The girls very plain—very; the eldest, Anatolia, has taken rather a fancy to me, I believe—oh, you needn't laugh, it is no great compliment, I assure you."

And so he let the garrulous boy run on, not more amused by his ingenuous confessions than by the shrewd, keen, practical estimates of men and things he had by haphazard formed. If Mr. Drummond had had the honour of Lady North's acquaintance, he would probably have taken a couple of months to form a judgment about her ; and that judgment would have been founded on all sorts of speculations with regard to her birth, education, temperament, early life, and present ambitions. Young Miller, on the other hand, had seen her but twice or thrice ; he positively knew nothing about her ; but he hit on a very shrewd guess as to her ways, and he managed to convey to his friend a pretty clear picture of the short, fair, dignified, stupid, but well-meaning woman, whose excessive literalness, and consequent suspicion—for suspicion is the substitute employed by people who lack imagination and clear perception—had almost driven her stepdaughter crazy.

"And what about Vi—— about Miss North?" said James Drummond, rather hesitatingly. "When do they expect her home ?"

"I don't think the lovely Anatolia is anxious for that event, for the chances of her ever getting married won't be improved ; but she says her eldest sister, as she invariably calls her, is coming home very soon now. Why, it is nearly two years since she left ; I wonder what she will be like."

"What she will be like? That is easily answered. What she will be, that is of more importance," said Drummond, and for a second or two he sate silent. "She will have grown a woman since you saw her."

"But you don't suppose anybody changes completely in a couple of years?" exclaimed Miller.

"Oh no, not completely," said his companion, rather absently. "What will she be like? Well, in appearance very much what she was—a little more brave and self-possessed in manner, probably, as becomes a woman. And doubtless she will be handsomer than ever. But as to what sort of a woman she has become by this time—who can tell?"

"Oh, I don't suppose there can be much difference," said young Miller, impatiently.

His friend smiled good-naturedly.

"You boys!" he said. "It is always the one notion you have got into your head. You hope she has remained the same, that you may resume that piece of romanticism that was so cruelly broken off. Isn't that it?"

"Well?" said the young man, ingenuously and modestly.

"You think the school-girl is coming back to play at sweethearting again? I am afraid you will be disappointed. A girl grows so terribly—in experience, in character, in aims—between seventeen and twenty! Do you know, Miller, that you will have to introduce yourself to a new Miss North?"

"I don't believe it," said the other. "How can you tell? Because she has written clever letters? But everybody is formal in letters; and I don't suppose she talks like that."

"I don't suppose she does," said Drummond, apparently thinking of something very far away from that dinner-table, and so the subject dropped for the moment.

As they were walking along Piccadilly that night, Miller said:

"I hear that Sir Acton North is a very rich man."

"I suppose he is," Drummond answered.

"He has got an uncommonly fine collection of pictures; at least so one or two of the people there the other evening were saying. I'm not up to that sort of thing. By Jove, if I had his money, I shouldn't spend it on pictures and live in Euston Square. How much do you think he will give his eldest daughter when she marries?"

Drummond burst out laughing.

"What an extraordinary question! Do you think life is long enough to let one speculate on conundrums like that? What possible interest could I have in making guesses as to Violet North's fortune?"

But he suddenly recollected himself. He looked at his companion with a sort of surprised curiosity in his eyes.

"Oh, I see: you—do you expect to have an interest in that question?"

"I say nothing about myself," said the younger man, rather peevishly. "What harm is there in asking what money a girl is likely to have? Of course I expect the girl I shall marry, whoever she may be, to have some money. I shall have some. There is no great mercenariness about that, is there ? It appears to me reasonable enough. You seem to think that anyone on this side of thirty must have his head stuffed full of romance and trash. Well, I don't make any pretence of that kind. I think it is a fair bargain—you bring so much money into the affair, and I don't see why the girl shouldn't also—just as the women of the poorer classes bring a chest of drawers and some blankets. It makes a woman far more independent too. She can indulge in expensive tastes, and charity, and all that, without feeling that she is drawing too hard on her husband. Now what do you say to that ? "

"Oh, nothing," said Drummond. "It is reasonable."

"Yes, I think it is reasonable," said young Miller, rather warmly. "And don't you think a reasonable woman would have the same notions ? A school-girl, of course, is all for love and love's sake alone, and moonlight, and rope-ladders. A sensible woman knows the cost of a house in Hyde Park Square, she is precious glad to have two incomes instead of one for her family."

"And then, you see, Violet North is coming back a sensible woman, not a school-girl," remarked Mr. Drummond, kindly bringing these various statements to a legitimate conclusion.

"Oh, I didn't quite mean that," said the younger man. "Not at all. I was only saying that when I married I should not be at all offended if the girl had a little money of her own. I don't suppose I am more mercenary than other people; but I see what the effect is of starting a house and family on the income that was all very well for a bachelor's rooms."

"Quite right; quite right."

Now there was nothing that Mr. Miller disliked so much as being dismissed in this fashion when he was trying to engage his newly-formed acquaintance in talk. James Drummond scarcely ever agreed with anybody; and when he briefly said, "All right," or "Very well: quite true," it was a sure sign that he simply would not take the trouble to enter into the subject. Fortunately, at this moment they had just got to the corner of Half-Moon Street; so they separated, and Drummond got into a hansom and made for home.

It was about a fortnight after this evening that young Miller found himself the guest of Mr. Drummond; and the small circle—which now included little Amy Warrener, who had become almost a young lady—was listening to the disquisitions of a philosopher who shall be nameless. He was labouring to prove—or rather, he was dogmatically asserting—that the happy man was he who could forget the past and disregard the future, fixing his attention on the occupation of the moment, and taking such joys as came in his way with a light heart. Why think of the long drive home if you are at the theatre? Why think of the next day's awakening and work if you are spending a pleasant evening? The philosopher in question maintained that this banishment of anticipation was a habit which could be cultivated; and that a wise man would resolve to acquire so invaluable a habit.

"And then," said he, contradicting himself with happy carelessness, "what are the joys of the moment to your expectations of them? Put them well on ahead; give yourself up to imagining them; and you will reap the value of them twenty times over before they arrive. We, for example, mean to go up again to the Highlands this autumn——"

Here a young lady clapped her hands with joy.

"—and at the present moment the Highlands are a greater delight to me than they will be then. I can defy those rushing butchers' carts, those inhuman organ-men, the fear of formal calls, by jumping off into the Highlands, and becoming a savage—a real out-and-out savage, careless of wind, and rain, and sunlight, and determined to slay all the wild animals I can find in a day's tramping over the heather——"

"Have you much game in that place?" asked the practical Mr. Miller.

"Plenty!" cried Mrs. Warrener, with a cruel frankness. "But he never hits anything. I believe we should never have a bird or a hare except for old Peter."

"Libels—mere libels," said the philosopher, returning to his subject. "Now just think of the delight—here in this howling wilderness of London—of taking out your gun, and seeing that it is all well oiled and polished; of trying on your leggings to take the stiffness out of them; of hauling out your old shooting-coat and finding in it a bill telling you at what hour the coach starts for the Moor of Rannoch. Now this is real delight. I snap my fingers at London. I become a savage——"

Just at this moment the maid tapped at the door and brought in a letter. Surely he knew the handwriting?

"You will excuse me," said he, hurriedly breaking open the envelope, "when I tell you—yes, I thought so—Violet North is, by Jove, in London!"

The Highlands were forgotten in a twinkling.

"Oh, uncle, when is she coming over?" cried Miss Amy, with piteous eyes.

"Already back in London!" cried Mrs. Warrener.

"And where is she living?" cried young Miller.

Mr. Drummond stood out in the middle of the floor, holding the folded letter up in the air.

"Ha, ha, my young people, there are secrets here; who will bid for them? A thousand mines of Golconda the first offer! No advance on that?—why——"

Well, he stopped there—and all the merry-making went out of his face—for some one at the door said quietly,

"May I come in?"

Amy Warrener was the first to answer; and her answer was a quick, sharp cry of delight as she sprang to the door. Then the door was opened; and a tall young lady walked into the room, with wonder, and gladness, and shyness on her handsome face.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME.

For a second or two she was smothered up in the embraces of the women; then she turned, with a heightened colour in her face and a glad look in her eyes, but with a wonderful grace, and ease, and dignity in her manner, to Mr. Drummond and his guest. Amy Warrener, herself "laughin' maist like to greet," became aware in an instant that, although this was Violet North come back again, she was not quite her own Violet of former days. There was some new and inexplicable quality about her manner—a sort of gracious self-possession that bespoke the development of womanhood.

And yet it was with all a girl's vivacity and eager impetuous curiosity that she began to pour out questions. She wanted to know all at once what they had been doing, where her school-girl friends were, how Miss Main was getting on; and then she suddenly cried out—

"Oh, you don't know how nice it is to be home again, and I could not feel at home in England until I came over here."

"And don't you notice any changes?" Drummond asked.

"Oh yes," she said, looking more particularly at him; "I scarcely understand it all yet. It is like a dream as yet—such a change from what I expected."

"Two years make a difference," said he. "We have not kept stationary any more than you have—and you!—why, you have grown a woman."

"Oh, but it was exactly the reverse of that I meant!" she said, anxiously. "You look all so much younger than I expected—except Amy. Why, I used to look on you, Mr. Drummond, as—as rather——"

"As rather an old fellow!" he called out, with a shout of laughter over her embarrassment. "Well, I am old enough, Violet, to warn you not to make people such compliments as these. And so you think we have grown younger?"

"You especially—oh, so much!"

"And I also?" young Miller made bold to ask, though he cast down his eyes.

Now these two had not spoken before. When she came into the room, she had glanced at him with some surprise; then, from time to time, she let her eyes fall on his face with an expression of a half-shy, half-humorous curiosity. Now she mustered up courage to look him straight in the face; and a trifle of colour mounted into her cheeks as she answered, in a somewhat low and embarrassed way—

"I am afraid I scarcely can recollect well enough. You know our—our acquaintance was very short."

So she had not even taken the trouble to remember him!

"I suppose," said he, rather shortly, "you made enough friends out there to pass the time with."

"I forgot none of my friends in England," she said, gently. The reproof was just: he had no right, she plainly intimated, to put himself on a level with these old friends of hers.

By this time the little party had got better shaken together—the first eager curiosity being over—and now Miss Violet began to tell them something of her wonderful adventures and experiences. But the strange thing was that the recital mainly proceeded from the lips of Mr. Drummond. It was by the exercise of a curious, swift, subtle sympathy that he seemed to divine what would be the notions of a girl in this new country; and as she went on, mentioning this circumstance and the other, he took the parable out of her mouth and made himself the interpreter. No one noticed that he did so. It seemed to be Violet North herself talking.

"Precisely," he would say, "I quite see how that half-civilized life must have struck you. Don't you see, you were getting then some notion of how the human race began to fight with nature long before cities were built. You saw them clearing the woods, making roads, building houses, founding small communities. You saw the birth of villages, and the formation of states. You saw the beginnings of civilization, as it were; and the necessity of mutual helpfulness among the settlers; and the general rough-and-ready education of such a life. Don't you think it must have been a valuable experience to find out how thoroughly new life can be? Here in London, I have no doubt, you got it into your head that the houses and shops must have existed there for ever; that the trains to Ludgate Hill and Victoria were a necessary part of the world; that all the elaborate institutions and habits of city life were fixed and unalterable——"

"And then it was so interesting, in these places, to find out what sorts of food they had—I got quite learned in crops——."

"Ah, yes, precisely. There you saw food at his fountain-head, not in blue packets in a grocer's shop. And of course every man would have a pride in his own fields and ask you what you thought of his crops, and you would come to see something else in a landscape than the mere colours that an English young lady would see. The cattle—did you begin to learn something of the points of the cattle?"

She had to confess her ignorance in that direction.

"Then the wilder and fiercer cattle, Violet—go on and tell us of buffaloes, and grizzlies, and mustangs—I have loved the word mustang ever since I was a boy. Gracious me! how I used to long for the life of a savage—for prairies, and war-trails, and squaws, and mocassins: Violet, did you ever snare a brace of mocassins when you were meandering about the Rocky Mountains?"

"If I were you," she said, with a sweet sarcasm, "I would say, 'mocassíns,' not 'mocássins!'"

"Thus it is she crushes us with her newly-found knowledge. But we are willing to learn. Violet, you shall teach us all about assegais and boomerangs—but those don't belong to America, do they?—and we shall admire the noble savage."

"You were talking of the delights of a savage life—in the Highlands—just before Miss North came in to surprise us," said Mr. Miller.

"Oh," cried Miss North, suddenly, "why didn't you go to the Highlands last year? I thought you had determined to go every year after your first experience the year before last."

"The truth is—" said Mr. Drummond, with some embarrassment.

Young Miller broke in—proud to be able to convey information,

"He won't tell you, Miss North. The fact is he went and gave his holiday-money to a clergyman's widow to take her family down to the sea-side; and if you ask my opinion about it, I think it was much too much of a good thing. I don't see the fun of— ."

"Violet, what did you think of New York?" said Drummond quickly.

The girl laughed: she knew he was not anxious to know her opinion of New York.

"But you are going this year to the Highlands?" she said.

"We hope so."

"I wish I were going with you," the girl said, simply and naturally.

"Why shouldn't you?" said Mr. Miller boldly.

It was a pretty project that he then and there formed. Miss North would go up to that shooting-box with her friends, and pleasant indeed would be the parties they would have in the evening, when the toils of the day were over. And if a certain young man should happen to be in the neighbourhood—by the merest chance, of course—could so hospitable, and generous, and kindly a fellow as Mr. Drummond was, refuse to offer him a few days' shooting? Then there would be odd moments now and again for clamberings up the hills, in order to sit on the sunlit rocks and listen to the humming of the bees, or for quiet and pensive strolls along the valleys in the cool of the evening, with the mountains losing the last fire of the sunset, and a white mist gathering along the bed of the distant loch. Mr. Miller looked anxiously for an answer to this proposal.

"Why shouldn't you?" echoed Mr. Drummond. "We will make you welcome enough."

"You are very kind indeed," she said, with a smile; "but I am under proper government now. Lady North means to try to put up with me as well as she can; and my sisters almost succeeded this morning in making me believe they liked me. So I am to stay on there; and I suppose in consequence we shall move westward some day soon. That will be hard on poor papa; for he will shift his house all for nothing—."

"Why, Violet?"

"Oh," said the young lady with her ordinary cool frankness, "Lady North and I am sure to have a fight—quite sure. I think her a mean-spirited and tricky little woman; she thinks that I have a frightfully bad temper; so it will be just as it was before."

"There you are quite wrong," said Mr. Drummond quietly. "It will not be as it was before; but very different. Do you know what people will say of you now if you and Lady North don't agree?—why that you have such a bad temper that you cannot live in your father's house."

"Perhaps that is true enough," she said, with great modesty—and Amy Warrener saw something in her mischievous smile of the Violet of other days.

"And then," continued her Mentor, "formerly when you had a quarrel, you could live at Miss Main's school. Where would you go now? Not to school again?"

"Ah, well," she said, with a bright look, "don't let us talk of all those unpleasant things now; for I am so glad to get back and be among you again that I am disposed to be humble and obedient even to my stepmother. And she is really trying to be very kind to me just now. I am to keep the brougham to-night till eleven o'clock, if you don't turn me out before then. And Lady North is coming over to call on you, Mrs. Warrener; and she wants you all to come to her next 'At Home' on the 30th. I think you have got a card, Mr. Miller?"

"Yes," said he, with some embarrassment. "Do you think your father would object to my going?"

"Oh dear no," she answered confidently. "Papa never keeps up old scores; and as well as I can recollect, you—you—seemed to have pleased him by going to him frankly. How silly we were!" she added quickly, and with a return of the warm colour to her cheeks.

They got away from that subject also, however, and no other reference was made to it. The girl was altogether delighted to be with her old friends again; and the changes she had noticed on her entrance became less prominent now. She submitted, just as she had done in her school-girl days, to be alternately lectured, teased, and laughed at, by Mr. Drummond; and she did not mind his continually calling her Violet. She made Mrs. Warrener promise to bring them all to Lady North's party. She would have Amy come with her for her first drive in the Park, where, as her father had consented, she should herself drive Lady North's victoria and pair of ponies.

Mr. Miller got the least share of her attention. These two rarely spoke to each other, and then never without a little embarrassment; but very frequently she had a quiet, curious look at him, apparently trying to discover something. As for him, he simply sate and stared at her—watching her every movement, fascinated by her voice, her smile, the bright frank look of those darkly-lashed eyes. But a great joy was in store for him. For some purpose or other, she took from her pocket a small pencil, but found it was broken.

"Oh, do let me get it mended for you," said he eagerly. "I know a man who is capital for that."

"Is it worth it?" said she, handing it over.

His reply was to take from his pocket a beautiful little pen and pencil-case with a knife attached; and this he begged her to accept in exchange, as it was better fitted for a lady than for him.

"In exchange?" she said, with a smile that was worth to him more than a thousand pencil-cases. "That would be a profitable exchange. This one is gold; mine is aluminium; thank you, but I could not rob you."

"Well, at all events, you can keep it until I return you this one?"

"Oh yes," she said, "if you will be so kind."

He put that humble little pencil-case—worth about five shillings—in his pocket with as much pride as if it had been made of ivory and diamonds; and he secretly vowed that she should never see it again, even if she lived for a thousand years.

Then, in the old familiar fashion of spending the evening which Violet knew so well, Mary the maid-servant came in with the frugal supper; and there was great amusement over her wonder at seeing Miss North.

"How are you, Mary? are you quite well?"

said that young lady, who was a great friend of all maid-servants and folks in humble capacity.

"Oh yes, Miss," stammered Mary;—"I mean ma'am—I am pretty well, thank you."

"Now there is but one question more I have to ask," said Violet, as they all sate round the small white-covered table, "and I am almost afraid to ask it. Have they built over Grove Park yet?"

"Certainly not," was the answer.

"And the big cedars are still there, and the tall elms, and the rooks' nests?"

"Not a thing altered since you left."

"Ah, well; do you know," she said, "when I used to think of the happiest time I ever spent in England and the most beautiful place I could remember, I always thought of those Christmas holidays I spent with you, and of our walks at night in the snow. Do you remember how we used to go out quite late at night, with the hard snow crackling beneath one's feet, the gas-lamps shining on the trees, and then go away into the Park, through the darkness of those cedars near the gate? Then I used to think of the silence we got into—by the side of the meadows—one seemed to be up quite close to the stars, and you could not imagine there was anybody living in those two or three houses. And as for London—though it lay almost under our feet—you know, you could see or hear nothing of it—there was nothing all around but the white snow, and the black trees, and the stars. Do you remember all that?"

"But where is it?" said young Miller, looking puzzled. Could she be talking so enthusiastically about some place in Camberwell?

"Over the way," she said promptly. "Five minutes' walk off."

"And that is the most beautiful place you can remember?" said he. "And you have been to Chamounix?"

"Yes it is," she said boldly. "I like Camberwell better than Chamounix, and therefore it is more beautiful. But I was speaking of the snow-time and the stars, and the quiet of the frosty nights. Perhaps you have never been into Grove Park? If you walk round that way now——"

"I propose we do," said Mr. Drummond, "as soon as we finish supper. I am anxious to discover what it is in the place that makes it the rival of Chamounix."

"Don't you remember?" she said, with great disappointment visible in her face.

"I remember the wonderful star-lit nights and the snow, certainly," said he.

"Very well," said she, "weren't they worth remembering? As to Chamounix—well, as to Chamounix—what can one remember of Chamounix? I know what I remember—crowded *tables d'hôte*, hot walks in stifling valleys, firing cannon and looking through a telescope, and all the ladies trying who could get up the most striking costumes for dinner. To go about a place like that with a lot of people you don't like——"

Here, for some occult reason, Mr. Drummond burst into a most impertinent fit of laughing.

"Oh yes," she said, with her colour rising, "I am not ashamed to own it. I liked the people with whom I went walking about Grove Park. If that has anything to do with it, I am very glad of it, for the sake of the Park."

"And they were very fond of you too, Violet," said her old schoolfellow, Amy, with unexpected decision. "And you are quite right. And I would—I would hate Chamounix, if I were you."

"Why, child, what do you know about Chamounix?" her mother said.

"I don't want to know anything about it—I hate it."

So that closed the discussion, which had ended in a unanimous decision that Chamounix was a miserable and despicable place as compared with a certain chosen spot in Camberwell.

Now if Miss North's love and admiration for Grove Park were largely based on the romantic conditions in which she remembered to have seen the place, surely Mr. Miller's impressions were likely to be equally favourable. For when they went outside into the cold night air there was an appearance in the sky overhead that told how the moon was visible somewhere; and they knew that when they got round into the high and open spaces of the Park a vast and moonlit landscape would be unrolled before their eyes. Miss Violet and Mrs. Warrener led the way; naturally the discoverer of this wonderful place was pioneer. There was scarcely anyone about; the footfalls of the small party were plainly heard in the silence of the Grove. Then they reached the gloomy portals of the Park—gloomy because of the cedars about—and then they left the region of bright gas-lamps and passed in and through the darkness of the overhanging trees.

The night was indeed a beautiful one, though as yet they had not seen the moon. The sky overhead was clear and full of pale stars; in the south a lambent planet was shining. How solemnly stood the great trees, their spreading branches of a jet black against the far-off vault of blue, not a rustle of their leaves breaking the deep stillness. There was a scent of hay in the air, one of the meadows adjoining having just been cut.

When at length they had reached the highest portion of the Park, and got by one or two tall and silent houses, behold! they came upon a wonderful spectacle. No dramatic surprise could have been more skilfully arranged; for they had become accustomed to the clear and serene darkness of the night, and the twinkling of the pale stars, and the motionless blackness of the lofty trees, and had no further expectation. But all at once they found before them, as they looked away over to Sydenham, a great and moonlit space; the air filled with a strange pale glamour that seemed to lie over the broad valley; while the full yellow moon herself hung like a great globe of fire immediately over a long low line of hill stretching across the southern horizon. These heights, lying under this glory of moonlight, would have seemed dusky, mystic, and remote, but that here and there glittered bright spots of yellow fire, telling of houses hidden among trees, and overlooking the wide plain. It was a wonderful panorama;

the burning stars of gold on the shadowy heights, the full yellow moon in the violet-grey sky, the pale light over the plain, and the black trees close at hand, the southward-looking branches of which were touched here and there by the mild radiance. Then the extreme silence of the place—as if that were a pageant all lit up in an uninhabited world—the cold, sweet night air—the mystery and sadness of the stars.

"Ah, well," said Drummond, with a sigh, "it does not matter whether it is Camberwell or Chamounix; you get very close to heaven on a night like this."

Young Miller felt that in his heart too; for he was standing beside Violet North; and as she was gazing away down into the south, with absent and wistful eyes, he could watch with impunity the beautiful outlines of her face, now touched with a pale and mystic light. He wished to speak to her, and yet he was afraid to break the strange stillness. She did not seem to be aware of his presence; but it was with a secret thrill of pleasure that from time to time his fingers were touched by the corner of the light shawl she wore.

"Is this as fine as what you remember?" he said to her, at length, in a low voice.

She seemed to try to collect herself. She looked at him and said "Yes;" but presently he saw her turn her head away, and he had just caught a glimpse of the great tears that stood in her eyes.

"Young Miller," said Mr. Drummond, as they walked back, "we have beaten down your Chamounix; we have destroyed Mont Blanc; the Glacier des Bossons is no more."

"Quite right," said the young man, humbly; "I give in."

Now when Violet got back to the house, she found her father's brougham at the door, and she would not enter with them. But she said to Mr. Miller, who happened to be her companion at the moment—

"I have some little presents for my friends here: would you kindly take them in for me?"

There was after all some school-girl shyness about this young lady; she had not had the courage to offer them the presents herself. And how gladly he undertook the commission!—he was proud to have her confidence in this small matter.

Then she bade good-bye to them all. She was a little silent as she left; it was like going away once more from home.

"Then I shall see you on the 30th," said George Miller, looking at her rather timidly.

"Oh yes, I shall be glad to see you," she said simply; and then she drove away.

He carried the parcels into the house; they were all neatly wrapped up and addressed. He undertook the business of opening them and displaying their contents; and lo! there was on the table a wonderful assortment of gifts, with the fancy of a girl apparent in them. For she had brought strange Indian pipes, decorated with silver and colours and silk, for Mr. Drummond, and a little case containing a couple of revolvers with ivory and silver handles;

and there were fans and a marvellous shawl for Mrs. Warrener; and there was an extraordinary necklet of pale coral, with bracelets and what not, for her daughter. James Drummond, gazing with astonishment at this goodly show, pronounced an oration over them.

"There was once upon a time," said he, "a company of poor folk sitting very disconsolate in a room together, and they had grown rather gloomy, and tired of the dulness and greyness of life. And all at once there appeared to them a fairy princess, with a beautiful smile on her face; and she came amongst them and talked to them, and all the sadness went out of their hearts, and she cheered them so that they began to think that life was quite enjoyable and lovely again. And when she went away, what did they find? Why, she had left behind her, without saying a word about it, all manner of precious and beautiful things, and the poor folk were almost afraid to touch them, in case they should crumble away. But they didn't crumble away at all; for she was a real, live, human fairy; and hadn't she promised to come back, too, and cheer them up a bit now and again? Young Miller, I am sorry she did not expect to see you too."

The young man pulled out the aluminium pencil-case proudly.

"Look at that," said he, "*and that belonged to herself.*"

"Now, James," said Mrs. Warrener, with a kindly smile, "what about her being hardened by all the railway-people?"

"And oh! how pretty she is; and she is more beautiful than ever!" cried Amy, rather incoherently.

Young Miller was silent for a second or two. "I suppose," said he, rather gloomily, "if she stays with her father now, she will be going about a great deal, and seeing lots of people. If she drives in the Park, every one will get to know who she is. How easy it is for girls to have their heads turned by the attention they get."

"It will take a great deal to turn Violet's head," said Mrs. Warrener, gently. "There is plenty of shrewdness in it."

When Mr. Miller set out to walk over to Sydenham Hill that evening, the notions that went whirling through his brain were alternately disquieting and pleasing. Had he not this treasure of a pencil transferred from her pocket to his? She had breathed upon it many a time; she had held it in her white, small fingers; perchance she may in an absent moment have put it up to her lips. It was a fair, still, moonlight night; he took out the bit of aluminium as if it had been a talisman and kissed it a hundred times. Then had she not admitted she would be glad to see him on this approaching evening? and already another day was about to begin, to lessen the long procession of dates. It was true that she was very beautiful and very proud; she would have lots of admirers. Lady North was fond of society; Violet would meet all manner of strangers; they would know that her father was a rich man; and they would be eager to win the affections of a girl who had beauty, money, everything to bestow. The wonderful moonlit landscape was not so lovely now, since she had driven away. The orange points of fire on the heights were almost extinguished. The world generally had grown less fairy-like ; but still he was to meet her in less than a fortnight's time.

CHAPTER XII.

WALPURGIS-NIGHT.

On the very next afternoon Lady North and Violet paid the promised visit to Mrs. Warrener. Unluckily James Drummond was not in the house; but his sister had enough of his shrewdness of perception to see how little likely it was that this stepmother and stepdaughter should ever agree—the one a prim, dignified, matter-of-fact little woman, who had a curious watchful and observant look in her cold grey eyes, and a certain affected stateliness of manner; the other a proud, impetuous girl, who had the bitterest scorn of all pretence and an amazing frankness in showing it.

Lady North, so far as her formal manner would allow, was profuse in her apologies to Mrs. Warrener for the short notice she had given her; and now it appeared that what Violet had modestly called an "At Home" was in reality a fancy dress ball. Mr. Miller had also been modest in the matter; and had not told his friends of his having received an invitation.

"It is so short a time," said Violet, "but I am sure you will come, Mrs. Warrener—and Amy too——"

"Not Amy at any rate," said the gentle little house-mother, with a smile. "My only doubt, Lady North, is about my brother. I am afraid a fancy dress ball would not quite fall in with his habits."

"My dear Mrs. Warrener," said Violet, with the air of a woman of the world, "it does not accord with anybody's habits; but it is merely a harmless piece of fun, that even very wise people like. You have no idea how pleased he will be by the show of beautiful costumes. And I know he will come if you say that I particularly asked him. We shall have quite a party by ourselves, you know—Mr. Miller is coming."

"And what will be *his* dress?" asked Mrs. Warrener.

"I don't know," said Violet; and then she added, with a sort of mischievous smile, "Tell him to come as Romeo. Would he not look well as Romeo? Now do, Mrs. Warrener, tell him that I wish him to come as Romeo."

"Very well, Violet," said Mrs. Warrener, with a smile; but she shook her head all the time—the school-girl had not wholly left this young lady.

Now, strange to say, Mr. Drummond accepted the invitation with eagerness and delight—it happened to strike some fancy. In a second he was full of schemes of costume. He would go as this, he would go as that; his sister must be Pharaoh's Daughter, must be Consuelo, must be Lady Jane Grey. In imagination he tumbled all the centuries together; and played hop, skip, and jump through history. In the end he was forced to confess that he did not know what to do.

There came to his aid a practical young man.

"The simplest thing in the world," said George Miller, with a superior air. "You come with me to a man in Bow Street; he will show you coloured plates; you can have a dress made for you; or you can see what he has. I will go with you: he will charge you ever so much too much if you let him."

"And you—have you got your dress?" asked Drummond, with a modest air, of this experienced person.

"It is being made," said he, carelessly. "I am going as Charles I."

"I have a message for you as regards that," said Mrs. Warrener, looking at him in her quiet and humorous way. "Violet was over here yesterday. She bade me tell you you must go to the ball as Romeo."

All the carelessness went out of the young man's manner in a second.

"No!" said he. "Did she really? It is not a joke?"

"I have delivered the message as I got it."

"By Jove! Then I must telegraph to them to stop the Charles I. dress—oh, I don't care whether I have to pay for it or not!—in any case I will go as Romeo." And then he added quickly, with a flush in his face, "Don't you think the joke a good one? She was making fun, of course; but what a joke it will be to surprise her?"

Forthwith it was arranged that these three should make up a little party to go to Bow Street; and on their way thither it almost seemed as if Mr. Drummond had gone out of his senses. Young Miller did not understand this kind of thing. Imaginary conversations between discarded costumes about the character of their successive wearers! Ghosts getting into a *costumier's* repository, and having a fancy dress ball by phosphorescent light! He treated such nonsense with impatience; he would rather have understood clearly what dress Mr. Drummond proposed to wear.

Then, even in presence of the grave and puzzled *costumier*, also! Young Miller, as a shrewd and practical person, perceived that this was a matter of business, and not a subject for all manner of whimsical absurdities. Where was the fun of bewildering a *costumier*, when that worthy person was patiently turning over the coloured plates?

"Mercutio," said Drummond. "Is that Mercutio? How plump and well favoured he is. I always loved Mercutio—but I did not know he was so good-looking. They say Shakespeare killed him because he could not keep up the supply of jokes that Mercutio needed. They might as well say that God took and plunged the rivers into the sea lest there shouldn't be enough water left on land for a long river-course. That's why the rivers always take the nearest way; and that's why poor old Mercutio was killed."

Now what was the good of talking like that to this puzzled tradesman and artist? Young Miller had continually to keep saying,

"And how much would that be—in blue satin and velvet, for example?"

It was indeed very lucky for these two that Mr. Miller had gone with them; for, in the end, when they had finally made their choice, he suggested an arrangement which lessened the proposed cost by more than one half. The costumes were to be made according to sketches which Mr. Drummond was to supply; but they were to remain the property of the *costumier;* and only their temporary use to be charged for. Not only Mr. Drummond, but also his sister, who had more to do with accounts, was quite impressed by the business-like way in which Mr. Miller drew up and ratified this contract.

One evening that little garden in Camberwell saw a strange sight. It was nearly dusk; under the cherry and apple-trees there was almost darkness. And what was this tall and silent figure, clad from head to heel in a cloak of sombre red, with a sword thrusting out the cloak behind, with a peaked black cap coming down on the forehead, and that surmounted by a tall red feather that here and there brushed the leaves of the trees? What manner of man was this, with ruddy shadows under the strangely vivid eyes, with cadaverous cheeks, with pointed beard and curled moustache, and with a fiendish grin on his lips? Then a younger man stepped down from the balcony; and behold, the youth was bravely clad in blue and silver, with a cape of velvet hanging from his shoulders; and there was a soft yellow down on his upper lip; and a look of gay laughter about his handsome face. He, in turn, was followed by a beautiful and gentle creature, who wore her yellow hair in two long plaits behind, and who appeared in a simple dress of white, with its tight sleeves and its satchel touched here and there with blue. Strangely enough, as the three figures walked here and there through the twilight of the garden, Mephistopheles, Romeo, and Margaret spoke the same language, and laughed with the same light laughter. It was their dress rehearsal: the solitary spectator being a young lady in the balcony, who said they looked like ghosts, and hoped she should not dream of them that night.

The important evening at length arrived; and Mr. Miller had arranged to dress at James Drummond's house, for he was quite sure that, without his supervision, Mephistopheles would be found lacking in fiendish eyebrows and moustache. James Drummond was not accustomed to these things; he was a mere child in the hands of young Miller, who dealt with this matter in a serious and didactic fashion.

The big house in Euston Square was all lit up; Chinese lanterns were hung along the covered way leading down to the gate; and on the pavement a large number of people had assembled to watch the arrivals descend from the carriages and walk up that lane of dimly-coloured light. There was a murmur of surprise when a tall, gaunt figure in sombre red stalked by; with a whisper of "The Devil!" Romeo was a little bewildered; he was wondering how Violet would be dressed; whether she would be kind or proud; whether she would dance with many people. He resolved that he would not stay in the room if she danced with any one other than himself; and he already hated that unknown stranger.

More brilliant lights; a sound of distant music; some servants, with staring eyes and anxious manner.

Mr. Drummond taps young Romeo on the shoulder. "You are in the way."

He stands aside; and two strange creatures go by.

"Thank you," says one of them, courteously. "You have allowed two centuries to pass."

As yet they are but encountering the outward ripples of the great whirlpool within. Cleopatra, proud and dusky, with golden ornaments pendant over her forehead, comes out into the cooler air of the hall; she is attended by an executioner, draped in black, and masked. Whose are these enormous scarlet feathers sweeping back from the cowl? Surely they and the long slashed cloak belong to a High Baron of Germany! There, at the foot of the stairs, Mary Queen of Scots is chatting pleasantly with a tall youth dressed as *chef de cuisine;* beside them stands the redoubtable Jean Sansterre, the lights gleaming on his suit of chain-mail, his huge shield and battle-axe. Harlequin whips by; the solemn

Master of Ravenswood appears with Ophelia on his arm; the mighty-hearted Barbarossa and the Fille du Régiment, laughing and talking together, are making for the ball-room.

"'*Art thou not Romeo, and a Montague?*'"

At the sound of that well-known voice our three strangers turned instantaneously; what wonderful vision was this—not the Violet North they knew, but Juliet herself descended in all her beauty from the moonlit balcony—her face a trifle pale, perhaps, but that may have been the reflected light of her robes of white satin—her magnificent black hair looking blacker because of this gleaming dress—her dark eyes full of fire, and light, and gladness—the proud, sweet mouth partly opened in the excitement of the moment, and just showing a glimmer of milk-white teeth. Young Romeo was altogether overwhelmed, blinded, bewildered. What great condescension was this—or was she but toying with him: she, the full-grown woman still fancying that he was but a youth?

There was more of the girl than of the woman, however, in the delight of her face, in the eager fashion in which she insisted on showing them where Lady North was posted.

"O Violet, how lovely you look in that dress!" Mrs. Warrener could not help saying, in an undertone.

"Can we get up the stairs?" the girl said. "Lady North is on the landing. Mr. Drummond, shall we lead the way?"

Surely Romeo and Juliet should have gone together. Romeo was rather silent when he saw that beautiful creature in the white satin and pearls pass on with the tall figure in sombre red.

For a few seconds the crush on the stairs kept them jammed in and motionless at one point of the ascent. Violet turned round; Romeo was just beneath; and she said to him, with a tender sweetness—

"'*How cam'st thou hither, tell me! and wherefore?*
The orchard walls are high, and hard to climb;
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.'"

He could not answer—his face flushed red with embarrassment; but fortunately another upward movement on the part of the crowd carried them on again and hid his vexation.

"She has studied her part better than you have," said Mrs. Warrener, with a quiet smile.

"How could I know?" said he, almost angrily. "I did not know she would be Juliet. I suppose these are the speeches Juliet makes. And one looks such a fool."

"But surely you know the pretty things that Romeo says to her?" said his companion.

"No, I don't," he said gloomily. "Poetry was never much in my way. But—but if you know, Mrs. Warrener—couldn't you give me a hint or two——"

"I think my brother has taken up your part," said she; and then, indeed, they heard that Mephistopheles and Juliet were addressing each other in very beautiful language. George Miller leapt to the conclusion that there was a great deal of exaggerated and tawdry sentiment about Shakespeare;

and that, in any case, theatrical stuff should be kept for theatres.

On the landing, and in a recess so that her guests could pass by her into the ball-room, they found Lady North, who was very dignified and very courteous. Her eldest daughter, Anatolia, stood by her. What made young Mr. Miller ask this rather plain young lady, so that his companions could distinctly overhear, for the next waltz she had free? He had not asked Violet to dance.

They looked in on the wonderful assemblage of picturesque figures—certain groups of them here and there in motion—the sound of music all through the place—the brilliant colours and diverse forms almost bewildering the eye. The fair Juliet, her hand still on the arm of the tall and sombre Mephistopheles, showed him a certain little pink card.

"I have not given away one dance yet," said she.

"Do you wish me to ask you to dance?" he replied.

"Yes."

"It is Romeo who ought to dance with Juliet."

"I wish to dance with you—or what is the same thing, I want you to engage me for one or two, that we may keep together, and see the people."

"Give me your programme, Violet."

He took it and managed, with some difficulty, to put certain hieroglyphs on it.

"Why you have put J.D. at every one!" cried Juliet.

"Yes," said he, "that is what I should prefer. But I am not greedy. Whenever you wish to cheer up the drooping spirits of your Romeo, I will set you free. What have you said to him, Violet?"

She turned round and regarded the young man with some wonder. He was certainly not looking well pleased.

"Come," she said, "I will take you all round by another way to the balcony, and you will see everything from there. That will be better than fighting across the room. But perhaps you wish to dance, Mr. Miller?"

"No, thank you," said he, gruffly.

She would take no notice of his manner. She said gently—

"If you will follow us, then, we can go round to the balcony and have a nice cool place almost to ourselves. Shall we go, Mr. Drummond?"

"I am no pilot," said he, in a tragic voice.

> "'*Yet wert thou as far*
> *As that vast shore washed with the furthest sea,*
> *I would adventure for such merchandise!*'"

"'*'Tis but thy name that is mine enemy!*'" she retorted, with a light laugh, as she again took his arm and led him away.

> "'*Thou art thyself, though Mephistopheles.*
> *What's Mephistopheles? It is nor hand, nor foot,*
> *Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part*
> *Belonging to a man. Oh, be some other name!*'"

"We appear to have got behind the scenes of a theatre," said young Mr. Miller, with savage contempt, to his companion.

"Don't you think it is very amusing," said Mrs. Warrener, in her quiet way, "to see the girl play Juliet so well? How delightfully gracious her manner is!"

"I think when you are on the stage, you ought to be on the stage," said he, bluntly; "and when you're in a private house, you ought to be in a private house. I don't see the fun of all that tomfoolery."

"Do you mean the fancy costumes?" Mrs. Warrener asked, with gentle sarcasm.

"Oh dear no—I mean that poetry and nonsense."

Certainly the small room through which they were now passing was, in one respect, like the gloomy corridors "behind the scenes." It was dark enough, but they could at all events see that in the centre of the room a table was placed which had a white cloth on it.

"Isn't Lady North kind?" said Violet. "She has given me this room for us. four, so that as soon as the others go down to supper we can have ours in here, in quiet and coolness."

"'*By whose direction found'st thou out this place?*'" asked her companion.

"Please, Mephistopheles-Romeo, to keep to your own speeches," she observed, with some dignity. "That one belongs to me."

From this small room they went out on the balcony, which was hung round with pink and white, and lit up with Chinese lanterns ; and, passing along, they came once more in sight of the brilliant ball-room, at the open windows of which they now stood. Two or three others had discovered this quiet retreat—opportune for conversation as well as agreeable on account of its coolness; but somehow these dusky figures loved the darkness rather than the light, and Violet's party, assembled in front of one of the windows, was left pretty much to itself.

She set to work to exorcise the demon—was it of some ridiculous jealousy?—that had got possession of this young man. She had not much trouble. Who could have withstood the bright frank smile, and the friendly look of her beautiful dark eyes? Besides, was he not in Juliet's own balcony—not looking up to her, but actually with her—while there was no petulant nurse to call her?

"Don't you mean to dance at all to-night?" said she.

"No."

"Not even with me?"

"Your card is full," said he, shortly.

"That is but a joke," she said. "I asked Mr. Drummond to make sure I should have plenty of time to spend with my especial friends; and he took the whole night; and I am not sorry. I fancy, Mr. Drummond, you think that dancing would not accord with the dignity of Mephistopheles, don't you?"

"Nor yet with his age," said he. "Dancing is for young Romeos. Young Romeo, why are you lounging idly here?"

The younger man was looking rather wistfully at Violet. He was beginning to be sorry for his sulkiness. Would she forgive him? Was her kindness real? Or was she only making fun?

"Will you dance this waltz with me?" said he, in desperation; and she assented at once.

They passed into the ball-room.

"I thought you were to dance with Anatolia?" she said, with a smile.

"She had to stay by Lady North," he answered. "I—I am very glad."

"You ought not to say such things: she is my sister. And why did you ask her?"

"I don't know," said he; and presently they were lost in the whirling crowd.

James Drummond and his sister had watched them enter the room. They were a sufficiently handsome couple, these two young people, as they stood there for a moment together—the slim, square-shouldered young fellow in blue velvet and silver, with his fine features all lit up now by a new gratitude and pleasure, and the tall, shapely, proud-featured girl, whose hair seemed blacker than the raven's wing in contrast with the gleaming white of her dress. After that they were visible but from time to time in the whirl of wonderful shapes and colours that moved to the light, rapid, and harmonious music.

"That is the beautiful time of life," Drummond said to his sister, as they watched these two go by. "Youth, health, bright spirits, the joy of living life instead of merely looking at it—and yet there is some sadness about the spectacle. Not to them, of course; only to the looker-on. They are not thinking of to-morrow, nor yet of middle-age, nor of any doubt or disquiet. Look at them—don't you wish you could make this moment eternity for them, and prolong that delight of rapid motion for ever and ever?"

"I do not," his sister said, promptly. "I don't know what you mean, James; but you are always coupling these two together, as if they must necessarily marry."

"Why not?" said he, rather absently.

"You know very well: the notion of a proud, high-spirited girl like Violet marrying a young man like that—who has got no more imagination, or feeling, or mind, than a block of wood!"

"You are never fair to young Miller, Sarah; he is quite as intelligent as most young men; and he is far more willing to improve himself than any I know."

"He shan't marry Violet."

"You used to like him well enough."

"Yes; because I never dreamed that anything serious would come of that foolish adventure of theirs. But now I am sure he means to marry her if she will let him; and I think she has a sort of tender, half-romantic interest in him at which she laughs, but which is likely to make mischief."

"That is how you describe marriage?" said he.

But at this moment the two young people came back—flushed, eager, gay in spirits; Romeo in especial being delighted, and showing his delight by being anxious to share it. Mrs. Warrener must really go in and dance. The flashing by of the different characters was wonderful. Had she seen Henry VIII. go down? What was this perfume they were burning?

Then he was anxious that Violet should give him the next dance, and the next dance, and the next again. But she refused. She was not going to desert her friends. When this present dance was over, she invited Mephistopheles to walk with her through the room that they might look at the crowd together; and Romeo and Margaret followed, the former quite glad and contented now. It is true that he had more rivals than ever. Violet North was known to but few of her stepmother's guests; but the appearance of the girl was too striking to escape unnoticed; and there were all sorts of applications to Lady North for an introduction to the beautiful young lady dressed as Juliet. That young lady was exceedingly courteous to these successive strangers; but how could she promise them a dance, seeing that her card was full to the very last line?

So the night went by, in music, laughter, and gladness; and they had supper all by themselves in that little room, the fair Juliet being queen of the feast; and Lady North sate with them for a time, and said some pretty things about Margaret's dress; and Violet's father looked in on them, and said to young Miller, "Well, sir, been running away with any more school-girls lately?" As for the young lady herself, the light on her face was something to look at; it seemed to one sitting there that youth had nothing more beautiful to give than such a night.

"What do you think of it all?" she said to Mr. Drummond, when they went back into the ball-room, to look on at a slow and stately minuet that was being danced by a few experts. "Don't you think it is lovely?"

"I am trying to think what you think of it," said he. "To me the chief delight of it is the delight I see in your face. I have never seen a girl at her first ball before; it is a good thing to see."

"Why do you speak so sadly?"

"Do I?"

"Yes. And when I am not by, I see you looking at the whole affair as if it were fifty miles away. I wish you would dance with me, instead of merely standing and looking on like that."

"It is for young Romeos to dance," that was all he would say—and he said it very kindly to her; and indeed at this moment young Romeo did come up and claim the next dance, so that she went away with him.

A little time after, when the loud music ceased, and there was nothing heard but a newly-awakened hum of conversation and the shuffling of feet, young Romeo said to his partner—

"Shall we go through that little supper-room, and surprise them in the balcony?"

"If you like," she said: she was ready for anything.

They got out and round to that small room; the candles were still burning brightly on the table. She was leading the way, for there was room but for one to pass, when he put his hand on her hand to detain her. She looked round in some surprise.

"Just a second," said he, and she could not understand why his eyes should look so anxious. "I want to speak to you, Violet —I have something to say to you——"

Then she understood him in a moment; and she drew back, afraid. Her first impulse was the school-girl one, to beat a sudden retreat into the balcony: her second the woman's one, to implore him to spare them both the unnecessary pain of a request and refusal. But she had miscalculated his intentions.

"Only this," said he, in nervous haste, "will you promise me not to marry anybody for two years to come?"

It was a strange request; a declaration of jealousy rather than of love. The girl was rather pale, and she was certainly frightened: had she had more self-possession she would have laughed.

"I don't quite know what you mean," she said. "I am not likely to marry any one—I don't think of marrying any one——"

"All I want is a chance," he said, and he put both his hands over that one that he still held, while he looked in her face. "You will let me hope that some day I may persuade you to be my wife——"

"I cannot promise—I cannot promise," she said, almost wildly.

"I don't ask you," he said. "Violet, now don't be hard."

She looked at him—at the entreaty in his eyes.

"What do you want me to say?" she asked, in a low voice.

"That you will give me leave to hope that some day you will marry me."

"It is only a 'perhaps'?" she said, with her eyes turned to the floor.

"It is only a 'perhaps,'—that is all," he said, eagerly.

"Very well, then."

In his transport he would fain have kissed her; but he was afraid; he kissed her hand passionately, and said she was an angel of kindness.

"And then," said he, "Violet, you know I must ask your father's permission——"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried instinctively, feeling that that would pledge her more and more.

"But only as between him and me," the

young man said, with the same impetuous haste. "You have nothing to do with it. You are not bound by that. But of course he sees already why I have become so intimate with the rest of the family; and this would only be putting everything straight and above-board——"

"Oh, very well," said she, rather quickly. "There must be no stupid secret this time. And you will tell my father that I have not promised to marry you—that it is only——"

"I will tell him everything. Violet, how kind you are!"

"Come away," she said hurriedly, and her face was pale. "You must dance with Mrs. Warrener."

What had suddenly raised the spirits of this young man to the verge of madness? He seemed drunk with delight; his face afire with pleasure; his laughter extravagant; his speech rapid and excited. Violet, on the other hand, was pale, concerned, and silent. When George Miller took Mrs. Warrener away into the room, Violet, left alone with Mr.

Drummond, said little, but that little was said with an unusual earnestness of kindness. He would have been surprised by it but that he knew how anxiously kind she always was to her old friends.

He drew her attention to a strange blue light that began to be visible even through the ruddy awning of the balcony. It was time they were getting home.

"And I am so glad that you have been amused. I should have been miserable if you had taken all this trouble and been disappointed."

"Do not fear that," said he, with a smile. "To look at you enjoying yourself would have been enough pleasure for any one."

It was, indeed, the cold grey of the morning when these strange figures issued out of the ruddy hall and made their way home in the new and pale light. Of what were they all thinking, now that another day had come, and the hurry and excitement of that Walpurgis-night over and gone for ever?

One young man, in a four-wheeled cab,

making for Piccadilly, was communing with himself thus:

"How handsome she will look at a dinner-table! In her case, any way, a man might fairly be proud of taking his own wife out for a drive. I wonder what my father will do for me—surely something handsome; and then, if her father gives her anything at all decent, we shall get on very well. By Jove, what a precious lucky fellow I am? And she sha'n't have to fear any neglect or unkindness from me; I see too much of that going on."

In another vehicle, going in another direction, a tall, thin, middle-aged man, looking rather sad, worn, and tired, was talking to his sister. But surely not of the fancy-dress ball?

"I suppose," he was saying, in his absent and dreamy way, "that Roland, the brave knight Roland, never existed. I don't much care about that; for the man who imagined such a perfect type of manhood—who, among all the trivialities and commonplace of the life around him—the breakfasts, dinners, and suppers, the rising in the morning to wash your face—the wretched details of one hour after another—well, I think the man who managed in the midst of all that to imagine such a splendid figure as Roland was far greater than the Roland he created. Don't you think so, Sarah? I don't care whether King Arthur ever lived; because a greater than Arthur lives now, and tells us about him. And yet I think that Tristram is the bravest knight, and has the most picturesque story, in the *Morte d'Arthur.*"

And again—but surely this had nothing to do with the fancy-dress ball?

"I wonder if the wise men of Egypt wished to teach the people a lesson in humility when they made the beetle an object of worship? Or was it a challenge to faith? Fancy what an imposture the owl was as a symbol of Minerva—the biggest fool of a bird you can find. I suppose owls don't eat grapes; but no bird but a half-blind owl could have been such a fool as to peck at Zeuxis' painted grapes."

And again—but what on earth had this to do with the fancy-dress ball ?

"What a fine thing it must have been to carry about with you a sword—the sort of consciousness, I mean, of having the power of life or death with you. If you were weak, the sword became part of yourself, and gave you strength. Now they go to war with engines and machines! and I suppose you seldom know you have killed a man. But don't you think that a great war must leave behind it, in thousands of human bosoms, a secret consciousness of having committed murder ?—a suspicion, or a certainty, that a man must not even mention to his wife ? —the half glimmer of a dying face, the horrid recollection of a vague splash of blood ?"

In the house which these three people had just left a young girl sate alone in her own room, her face bent down, her hands clasped on her knees.

"Have I promised—have I promised ?" this was what she was thinking. "How anxious and pitiful he looked—and that is the time that comes but once to a girl, to be kind or to be cruel to her first lover. I could not be cruel; and yet I am not deeply pledged. We may find out it is all a mistake, after all; and when we are old, I dare say we shall laugh over our youthful romance. When will he speak to my father?"

Her thoughts took another turn—fled southward with the speed of lightning:

"Oh, my good, kind friend," she would have said, if she had translated her fancies into speech, "why were you so sad to-night, and silent, and far-away in your look? You said you were pleased—only to please me. Have you no one to ask you what you are thinking about, when you look like that? And don't you know there are some who would give their life—who would willingly and gladly give their own worthless life away—if that would brighten your sad eyes and make you cheerful and happy?"

CHAPTER XIII.

FIRE AND WATER.

If George Miller had any hope of winning Violet North for a wife, he set about the task in the most wrong-headed of fashions. A little more imagination, and of the perception that accompanies imagination, would have shown him the folly of prematurely brandishing in the face of a high-spirited girl, who dearly loved her liberty, those shackles of matrimony which ought to have been kept in the background, or altogether concealed. He would have seen that his best chances hung on his fostering that sentiment of half-humorous, half-tender romance with which she was disposed to regard her youthful lover; he ought to have let the gentle process of time strengthen this sentiment; he ought to have accustomed her to the notion of losing her liberty by slow and insidious degrees. The matter-of-fact young man missed all that. He wanted to know exactly how they stood. He could not understand why they should not be engaged like other people. What harm was there in a ring? In a word, he was anxious to take possession of a beautiful wife; while she regarded his claims upon her with surprise and distinct aversion—hence all manner of lovers' quarrels, which were exciting enough, but rather dangerous.

First of all, he had gone to Sir Acton North, who received him with much friendliness.

"What!" said he, when the young man had told his story, "you run away with a girl, and then you come and ask her father for permission to court her! that is putting the horse behind the cart, isn't it?"

Mr. Miller was very nervous! but when his proposed father-in-law was good enough to make a joke, he was bound to laugh at it; so he grinned a ghastly grin.

"What does she say, eh? What does she say herself? That is the point."

Indeed the great railway engineer could have no objection to the young man as a husband for Violet. He was of a rich and reputable family; he was young, good-looking, apparently good-tempered; his business prospects were excellent. There was another point to be considered. Sir Acton had a suspicion that the truce between his wife and her stepdaughter was dangerously hollow; at any moment the girl might have to go; and whither could she go? If she wanted to marry this young man, why should she not? Moreover, he knew he would be paying a compliment to Lady North in rather encouraging the attentions of this young man; so that, while he pleased himself by rendering Violet's future more secure, he would make his consent a favour granted to his wife. This is always good policy on the part of a husband.

"Well, sir," young Miller answered, "I have asked nothing definite. I thought it better to come to you first."

"Quite right, quite right. Well, you must question herself, you know; but be cautious."

Mr. Miller was rather puzzled by the twinkling light that came into the grey eyes of this big, white-bearded man.

"She wants dealing with," said her father, frankly. "She won't be mastered. However, she has been very quiet and good since we came back from Canada—perhaps that will last."

These cautions were rather ominous; but then a young man is always convinced that he knows a dozen times as much about the nature of his sweetheart as her own father or mother knows, who has only lived with her for a matter of twenty years or so.

"There is another point," said George Miller, pulling his courage together, and proceeding to talk with a business-like air. "Of course I don't know what she will say; but it may be better if I tell you how my money matters stand. I hope shortly to have about 900*l.* or 1,000*l.* a year from this partnership. Then, when I marry, I expect my father will give me 20,000*l.* I don't see how he could give me less than that, because he gave as much to my sister, when she married, and I am the only son."

"When you get it, don't put it in railways," said Sir Acton, briefly.

"Oh dear no," said young Miller (though he would have liked half-an-hour's chat on this matter with so competent an authority). "If I can't get two or three good mortgages—and I suppose it is difficult to get them now-a-days at six per cent.—I mean to spread the money over half-a-dozen of the best foreign stocks; and that way you can average nearly six per cent. without very much risk."

"Very good—very good," said Sir Acton; "but keep it nearer five. Five is quite enough; there is never any great safety over five."

"And then," said the young man, rather hesitatingly, "I suppose I shall have about 2,000*l.* a year."

"Very good; quite enough to live on," was Sir Acton's business-like reply. "Too much, I should say, for young people. You ought to save on that."

Mr. Miller waited for a second; he seemed to expect that Sir Acton would say something more. Was there to be no mention—not even the least hint—of the possible dowry on the other side?

A servant came to say the carriage was below.

"You will excuse me, I am sure," said Sir Acton, shaking hands with the young man. "You will go into the drawing-room, I suppose—the girls are sure to be there."

"Sir Acton," the young man said, stopping him, "I haven't said how much I am grateful to you for—for——"

"No, no, not at all," said the other, as he hurried away. "You settle it all with her."

Mr. Miller crossed the passage, and entered the drawing-room; the music ceased as he did so, and one of Lady North's daughters left the piano. Altogether there were four girls in the room; one of them being Violet, who, knowing that Mr. Miller was in the house, and guessing the object of his visit, had taken refuge with her half-sisters, so that he should not find her alone.

It was a large and sombre apartment; for Lady North and her daughters affected high art in the matter of house-decoration. What with the dark painting of the ceiling, the bottle-green paper and brown panellings of the walls, the deep unrelieved red of the carpet; the black cabinets, and the stained windows, the spacious and melancholy chamber looked like a great sepulchral vault. It used to be said—but the statement was not true—that Lady North's daughters, when they happened to be at home in the evening, sat in a row in this solemn apartment, all of them silent, all of them dressed in white, each holding a tall white lily in her hand, and having a silver star in her hair. At the present moment, at all events, they were not so engaged. They seemed singularly disturbed, restless, and embarrassed when Mr. Miller entered—all except Violet, who, to tell the truth, looked a little impatient and angry. First of all, the young lady who had been playing said she wished to find some music somewhere; and left the room. After a second or two, another came to the conclusion that Sally would never find the music! and so she set off to look for it. The colour in Miss Violet's face deepened. Then the third and remaining sister sprang up and said,—

"Isn't that the postman, Violet? Oh, I must go and see what he has brought."

This was too much.

"You know it is not the postman," she said, hotly. "I wish, Anatolia, you would stay where you are."

"I shall be back directly," said Anatolia; and then she went quickly, leaving these two in solemn silence, both embarrassed, and one inclined to be vexed, angry, and rebellious.

"Why should you wish them to stay in the room, Violet?" he asked.

"Because I don't like to be made a fool of. They know quite well why you are here to-day. And they believe—they believe—I cannot tell you what nonsense they believe!"

"I know," said he. "The girls are sensible. They believe we are engaged, or about to be. Why shouldn't we be engaged?"

"Because I do not choose to be engaged."

"Everybody approves of it," said he. "Your father has no objections; I am sure Lady North would have none; and I can answer for my people that they would be delighted. And that is another thing, Violet—I should so like to introduce you to my family."

"You are very kind," she said, "but I don't see why I should be introduced to them any more than to other families whom I don't know."

"Well, that is rather strange," said he, "considering our relations."

"I was not aware of any relations existing between us."

"Oh, indeed."

"No."

"I think you are in rather a bad temper to-day."

"I don't wish to offend you," she said, "but it is better to tell you the plain truth. When you talk about an engagement, and about being introduced to your friends, you make me wish I had never seen you ; you do, indeed. Look at those girls going away—because they think we have secrets to talk over."

In her impatience she got up and went to the piano.

"What would you like me to play for you?" she said, coldly.

He was quite as much inclined to be angry at this moment as she was ; but he was afraid of the consequences. She was in a mood that might work mischief if she was provoked.

"Violet," he said, "do be reasonable. You are too proud. You dislike the notion of people imagining that you — well, that you care enough for me, or for any man, to think of marrying him. But every girl has to go through that; and if the truth were known, other girls don't laugh at her—they envy her. I do not wish to force you to do anything you don't like ; only I must say I expected a little better treatment when I came here to-day."

"I don't wish to treat you badly, or goodly, or any way," she said, with indignant incoherence. "Why can't we be friends like other people? I wish to be kind to you—I do indeed. All the time I was in Canada there was nobody in England I thought more about than you—at least there was next to nobody. And when I saw you over at Mr. Drummond's I thought it would be such a nice thing to be friends with you. And now you want to drag me into engagements and interviews——"

"Well, you are a stupid girl," said he, with a sudden burst of good humour. "Don't you know that you are so pretty that I am bound to try to secure you for my wife? You might go and marry somebody else while that nice friendship was the only bond between us. Come, Violet——"

He took her hand; she drew it away.

"What shall I play for you?" said she.

He suddenly regarded her with a suspicious look.

"Perhaps," said he, with equal coldness, "you have reasons for not wishing that we should be engaged?"

"Plenty," she said, frankly.

"Perhaps there is some one else to whom you would rather be engaged?"

A mischievous notion got into her head at this moment: she answered nothing.

"Am I right?" he said, with an affectation of lofty calmness.

"What if you are?" she said, looking down.

His calmness went.

"Then I consider," he said, warmly, "that, if that is so, you have been treating me shamefully—letting me come here on a fool's errand;—but I don't believe it—I tell you I don't believe——"

"You don't believe what?"

"That you are likely to be engaged to some one else."

"I never said anything of the kind," she said, with provoking sweetness. "I thought I had been telling you how I abhorred the notion of being engaged to anybody. If you choose to imagine a lot of foolish things, I cannot help it. I wished to be very friendly with you. I don't see why you should get into a temper. You have not told me what you wish me to play."

"Thank you," he said, "I think I must go now."

She rose, with great gentleness and dignity, and offered him her hand.

"I am sorry you are going so soon," she said.

He stood looking at her with irresolution, regret, anger, and disappointment, all visible at once in his face—disappointment most marked, perhaps.

"Some men," said he, calmly, "would call your conduct by an ugly name—they would say it was the conduct of—a flirt."

The word seemed to sting her like a horsewhip.

"I never flirted with any one in all my life," she said, hotly. "No one would dare to say such a thing to me."

"Why not?" he said, forgetting all his calmness, and becoming as vehement as herself. "You allow a man to ask you to marry him——"

"How could I prevent that?"

"You allow him to go to your father, and make arrangements, and have everything understood; and then you turn round on him, and say there is nothing understood, and hint that you would rather be engaged to somebody else, and all that—and that is not the conduct of a flirt? I wonder what is!"

"Then," said she, with flashing eyes, "if that is your opinion of me, you had better go."

"Yes, I will go," said he; and he crossed the room, took up his hat, bowed to her, and went out.

She sat down, with flaming cheeks, to the piano, and tried to play. That was not much use. She rose, and, hastily going to her own room, flung herself on the bed, and burst into a flood of passionate and angry tears, vowing to herself a thousand times that she would never again have anything to say to any man of woman born, not if she were to live a thousand years.

CHAPTER XIV.

"LIKE GETTING HOME AGAIN."

THE cup of her sorrows was not yet full. When she had quite exhausted her indignation over the perfidy and unreasonableness and bad temper of mankind, and when she had quite resolved that she would never marry—no, not if a king's son were to entreat her—she got up, and washed her face, and arranged her hair, and went to Lady North. In a humble and submissive tone she asked the little, dignified grey-eyed woman to let her have the brougham for that evening.

Lady North was surprised and offended. Her daughter Anatolia had run quickly to tell her that now there was no longer any doubt about Violet being engaged; for Mr. Miller was in the study in confidential talk with Sir

Acton; while Violet, silent and embarrassed, sate in the drawing-room, and would answer no questions about the young man. When, therefore, Violet now presented herself before her stepmother, that lady naturally concluded she had come to inform her of the engagement. In place of that she only asked for the brougham.

"Violet," said Lady North, coldly, "I do *not* think that this excessive secrecy becomes a young girl."

"I don't know what you mean," the girl said, with a sudden flash of indignation in her eyes. "What secrecy?"

"I do not wish to inquire, if you do not wish to confide in me," said the other, in her slow, precise fashion. "I should have thought I was the proper person to whom you ought to have come for advice. I have no doubt you want the brougham to go over to your friends in Camberwell:"

"I am very glad to have friends in Camberwell," said the girl, proudly. "It is something to have true friends anywhere. But what is the secrecy? What have I concealed?"

"You appear not to know," said Lady North, fixing her cold, keen, grey eyes on the girl, "that I was aware of Mr. Miller being with your papa?"

"And what is that to me?" Violet said, rapidly, and with hot cheeks. "Why should I come and report to you what does not concern me? If you were anxious to know what my father and Mr. Miller were talking about, why not ask themselves? There is something quite as bad as secrecy and concealment—and that is suspicion—constant suspicion, watching you at every turn, when you have nothing at all to conceal——"

She suddenly altered her tone; drawing herself up, and speaking with a certain proud indifference:

"I suppose you don't wish me to have the brougham?"

"Your papa won't be home till late this evening. Really, the responsibility——"

"All right," said the girl, turning towards the door, "a four-wheeled cab will do as well."

"Ah! Violet," said her stepmother, with a sigh, "no one seems to have the least control over you."

"No, because no one has ever cared to have," said the girl, bitterly, as she left the room—"never since I was born."

When she got outside the house, she seemed to breathe a freer and fresher air. Adventuring out by herself in this fashion did not seem to concern her much. She had no difficulty in getting a four-wheeled cab; and she bade the man, before crossing Waterloo Bridge, stop for a few minutes in the Strand.

She went into one shop, and bought a huge flagon of lavender-water, or some such scent: that was for Mrs. Warrener. She went into another shop, and bought a beautiful little kerchief: that was for Amy. Then she went into a bookseller's shop.

"I want you to give me a book on philosophy, if you please," said the handsome young lady, in her gentlest way.

"Certainly," said the bookseller; and then he waited further instructions.

"Oh, but I don't know what," she said, observing this. "You must tell me. It is for a gentleman who has studied nearly everything; and it must be a very good one. What is the best one you have got?"

"Really I don't know," said the bookseller, with a smile. "Here is John Stuart Mill's——"

"Oh, he won't do at all," said Violet, promptly; "he is alive."

The bookseller began to be interested and amused.

"I beg your pardon," said he, respectfully, "but you do not mean that your friend is wiser than anybody alive?"

"I did not quite say that," she answered, simply. "However, you must give me something he is not likely to have read—something very difficult, and first-class, and good."

Now if this customer had been a fussy old gentleman in spectacles, or a wrinkled old lady in black satin, the bookseller would have politely declined the responsibility; but there was a good deal of persuasive influence in the presence of this tall and handsome girl, with the big dark eyes and the sweetly-parted lips. He did not even laugh at her. He was most kind and patient in making suggestions, and in taking her round the shelves. And at last she pounced upon the proper book in triumph; for she remembered to have heard Mr. Drummond complaining that Mr. Darwin's last book had not arrived from the library, and here were the two green volumes of the *Descent of Man* staring her in the face.

"I am sorry to have given you so much trouble," she said, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"I am sure it is no trouble at all," said the bookseller, with quite unusual emphasis; and then, when the glass doors had shut behind that beautiful vision of youthful grace, he could not help wondering who was the happy man who had won the admiration and reverence of so lovely a creature.

So Violet and her treasures were bundled into the ancient four-wheeler; and once more she set out for her journey. By this time the lurid and sultry evening had died down into a gloomy and thunderous darkness; and by the time she had got near to Camberwell Grove night seemed to have come on prematurely. The lamps were being lit as the first low rumble of the thunder was heard; and presently the people began to flee from the pavements, where the splashes of the rain were leaving marks of the breadth of half-a-crown. The cabman stopped in order to pull out a waterproof cape.

"Why don't you drive on and get underneath the trees?" she called out to him; for they were now near the foot of the Grove.

When at length he was forced to pull up under the thick branches of the tall elms, the rain was coming down in fierce straight torrents, hissing out in the middle of the road, and rushing down the gutter in a brown flood. All the ominous stillness of the evening had gone; the wind had risen and was blowing about the summits of the elms and poplars; there was an echo of the distant thunder from time to time; the dark green branches swayed and creaked. By slow degrees, however, all this noise and tumult ceased; there was a pattering of heavy drops in the trees, but less hissing of rain in the road, as the cabman resumed his journey, and proceeded to urge his patient steed up the steep hill.

Now when Violet stepped out of the cab, up there near the top of the hill, all the world had grown clear and sweet after the rain. There was a look of lingering twilight in the sky; and one or two stars were becoming visible; while the high black branches of the trees seemed to delight in the wet, as they stretched up there into the pale serenity of the heavens. As she walked round and into the garden some quaint fancy struck her that she was herself like this sultry and sulky evening that had at last burst into torrents of rain and then become calm and serene. A great peacefulness stole in upon her heart as she passed through the small garden-gate; it seemed to her that now she was at home, and at rest.

And clear and still as the sky now was with its pale stars beginning to twinkle, it was no more clear, and still, and placid than the light that shone in her eyes when she went forward to greet her friends.

They had come out directly the shower was over, to breathe the sweet freshness of the air and the scents of the flowers. They, of course, were almost in darkness, but the small cottage was lit up; and what could be a more cheerful picture than the open French windows of the parlour, all aglow with orange light, and showing the bright, warm snugness within? They were compassionating her on having encountered the fierce storm; she felt as though she would gladly have encountered a dozen such storms to reach this haven of shelter and peace at last.

"Ah! you don't know," she said to Mrs. Warrener, with her arms linked in hers—"you don't know what it is to feel like getting home again."

"But I know how glad I am to hear you say that, Violet," her friend said; "for sometimes I think you are sure in time to go away and forget all about us."

"Yes—when I am dead," said the girl. "Not before then."

They went indoors, and, when Violet had put her hat aside, she sat down to the piano, and asked Amy to sing to her. She suggested the song too, for she began to play "Home, sweet home;" and then the companion of her school-girl days sang, in a simple, tender fashion, the old familiar ballad. What was James Drummond doing meanwhile? He was lying back in his easy-chair, regarding rather wistfully the figure at the piano, and saying to himself—

"Is it possible, then, that this girl has never had the sensation of being at home and at peace except in the house of people who are little more than strangers to her?"

She came away from the piano, and sate down on a stool which was lying on the hearth-rug.

"You don't think it a very clever song!" she said to him, timidly: it was a sort of apology for asking a person of his superior culture to listen to school-girl sentiment.

"I don't think cleverness has much to do with it," said he. "Did you ever carefully read the words of a song that pleased you? Does anybody? No, no. A chance phrase of tenderness touches you; and you give up all the rest—you are fascinated by some note of farewell, let us say, at the beginning of the lyric, and you forget afterwards to look particularly at the despairing sighs, and the raging main, and the usual stock-in-trade of the song-writer. That is how I look at it, anyway. The song-writer has only to catch you with a bit of melody, or sentiment, and you don't search for sense subsequently. But indeed, I have always had a suspicion of rhymed poetry——"

Here she clasped her hands over her knees. She had started him off. She was happy.

"I have always a sort of suspicion that the man has been led to overstate, or understate, or invent, a new theory altogether, at the diabolical temptation of a rhyme or a particularly catching phrase. I cannot be sure of it; but I always suspect it; don't you see? I believe that the suggestion of a happy rhyme is responsible for many a brilliant flight of fancy and for many a poetical assertion that is now taken to be full of a deep philosophy. Oh, by the way, about those lyrics; don't you notice how many of the Scotch songs consist of nothing but one or two catching phrases continually repeated? The phrase is something to sing, something a mother could dandle a baby to; there is no sense in the repetition, no story to tell, nothing in fact—but the song passes muster as a fine song for all that. But talking about songs is like scraping a rose-leaf to see where the colour is. Why did you leave the piano, Violet? Won't you sing something now?"

"Ah! no," she said. "My songs are all wicked songs—they are all about drinking and fighting; for I used to wish I could be a student at a German university—that was about the only ambition I ever had—and be able to drink flagons of beer, and fight with broadswords, and sing the Burschenlieder. My songs are mostly Burschenlieder now—they are too stormy for such a quiet, pleasant evening. I propose that we go on chatting; Mr. Drummond,—do you really think there was ever such a person as Ossian ?"

But this bid for the higher criticism was too obvious: Mr. Drummond burst into a fit of laughter.

"Miss Violet," said he, "you shall not induce me to talk your head off. My dear friends, we will postpone our lecture on Ossian until we can look across the blue hills of Morven—more especially as I hear the humble but useful Mary rattling the supper things about the place."

At this moment, indeed, Mary came into the room, and began to lay the cloth.

"You were speaking of the Highlands," said Violet, timidly.

"Yes," said he, "I fear we are discounting all the pleasures of the expedition by continually dreaming and dreaming of it."

"Oh, I am sure not," she said, rather

wistfully. "It will be most enjoyable for you, I know."

"But do you know this also," said he, "that I am taking it for granted you are coming with us too?"

"James," his sister remonstrated, "before you can take that for granted you must speak to Lady North."

"I should like to go," Violet said; and thereafter she was rather silent for a time.

There were but two things on which James Drummond prided himself—his judgment of landscapes and his method of making a salad. On the present occasion this latter task, as well as that of preparing some claret-cup, kept him busily occupied for several minutes, during which time nothing further was said about that projected journey northward. But by and by, as they all sat comfortably round the white little table, he began. It is highly probable that he himself imagined a general conversation was going on about the sea, and the hills, and shooting, and sailing, whereas, as a matter of fact, not a human being spoke but himself, the others being only too delighted to listen. For, as he rambled on it seemed as if there was a sound like the lapping of sea-waves in his talk—just as there is in the Mermaid's song in *Oberon*—and his mute audience saw, as he himself seemed to see, a succession of pictures—the early morning, with the scent of sweetbriar in the garden, and the grey mists rising from the far shoulders of Morven—the glad forenoons up on the warm hills, with the ring of the blue sea all round the land—the idling in the big boat with the long lines over the side, as the red sun went down in the west and all the water became as fire—the delightful walks at night-time, by the shore, with the sea plashing, and the cool winds stirring the scents of the bushes, and the stars overhead. These were pleasant things to think of and to hear of in the hopeless wilderness of London. They forgot the gas-lamps, and the crowded hovels, and the squalor and din; for they were looking into an enchanted land, filled with clear sunshine and the fresh winds from the sea. And somehow or other, whether intentionally or not, Mr. Drummond did take it for granted that Violet North was to be with them. She would see this, and go there; she would have to hear this, and be prepared for that. At last she cried out—

"Oh, I wish it were all true! I wish I were going with you!"

"And so you are," said he, promptly.

"Lady North is going to Venice," Violet said, with a sigh.

"Let her," he exclaimed, recklessly.

"But I am afraid we must all go—unless she and I happen to have a fight before then, and then she will be glad to get rid of me. It is — a great — temptation," she added, thoughtfully.

"What is?" he asked, though he guessed her meaning, for he saw a mischievous smile about the corners of her mouth.

"No," she said, with sudden decision, "it would not be fair to get up a quarrel in order to get away. She has tried to be very civil to me; and I must try to be civil too.

But it is hard work to be civil to some people."

They had some further talk about this northern excursion however, and it was easy to see how anxious the girl was to go with them. She seemed to cling to them somehow, as though they were her only friends. When she was told that the cab was at the door, she rose from the table with a sigh ; she was tearing herself away from the one place in the world where she found peace, homeliness, unworldly friends, and sweet guidance.

By and by that jolting vehicle was rattling along the noisy streets, past the glare of lighted shops and dingy groups of human beings. Already it seemed to her that she had left far behind her all that she knew of gentleness, and quiet, and tender companionship. That small household with its kindly feeling, its unworldly ways, its helpfulness, and charity, and wise counsel—that indeed was home to her; and as she thought of it, the refrain of an old German song—not one of the Burschenlieder—seemed to speak to her, and the speech was sad enough :

"*Far away—in the beautiful meadows—is the house of my home. Many a time I went out from it into the valley—O you beautiful valley—I greet you a thousand times—Farewell—farewell!*"

CHAPTER XV.

MISTAKEN GUESSES.

On the same evening George Miller hurried along to his club to dress for a small dinner-party to which he had been invited by one of his fellow-members. He was angry and indignant. He would no longer be subject to the caprice of any woman. Of course it flattered a girl's vanity to sue for her hand, and meekly submit to any conditions she might impose; but he would have no more of that. It was an unsatisfactory bargain in which the concession was all on one side. Did she imagine that he would enter upon the duties of a long courtship, without the least intimation from her that anything would come of it? Was he to pledge himself, while she remained absolutely free?

His host on this occasion was a Mr. Arthur Headley, a gentleman who had somehow or other made a large fortune in Australia, and come home to spend it. He was a singularly handsome man, six feet two in height, muscular, lithe, with fairly good features, and a magnificent brown beard. A maid-servant conversant with current fiction would have called him a demigod. It is true he was rather a fool—indeed, his brain seemed to have undergone but little modification in its transmission from the microcephalous ape but then he was a very amiable and good-natured person. There was but one spice of malice in his nature; and that declared itself in his treatment of the secretary of the club. He generally spent the day in worrying that harmless official. All his literary faculty was employed in composing essays of complaint to be laid before the committee. There was ordinarily more writing on the back than on the front of his dinner-bills. When he walked in the Park, in deep meditation, the chances were a hundred to one he was trying to invent some peculiarly cutting phrase to describe the disgracefully shabby appearance of the ash-trays in the smoking-room, or the shamelessly careless fashion in which the evening papers were stitched through the middle. Even demigods of six feet two must have an occupation.

They dined in a private room, and the talk was general. If Mr. Miller wished to forget the fickle race of womankind, here was an opportunity. The table was brilliantly lit; the service was quick, silent, efficient; the conversation was of a simple and ingenuous character. Indeed, under the presidency of Mr. Headley, the talk chiefly ran upon the internal arrangements and comparative merits of other clubs, and was directed to show that no institution was so badly managed as the Judæum. One admired the white and gold of the morning-room at the United Universities'; another rather preferred the ecclesiastical gloom of the Junior Universities'; another lamented the absence of a good entrance-hall; and a fourth, when the steward's tariff was under discussion, suddenly exclaimed—

"Why, God bless my soul! do you know they give you cold beef and a pint of claret at the Reform for one and twopence—one shilling and twopence for your lunch?"—— after which there was a pause of awestruck silence.

By and by, however, when a little wine had been drunk, everybody wished to talk, except one; and so the conversationalists inadvertently split themselves up into small groups. That one was Mr. Miller. He was rather gloomy. He did not seem to take much interest in what was going on; he listened, in an abstracted fashion, to this or that controversy about wine, or yachts, or bootmakers, and heeded but little.

Suddenly, however, he heard something that made his heart jump.

"Who is that tall girl with the white feather," asked a gentleman on the other side of the table, some one having been talking of the Park, "who drives the pair of greys?"

"Oh, don't you know?" said Mr. Headley, carelessly. "She's a daughter of North, the railway-man."

"She's an uncommonly good-looking girl, that's all I know. She has only come quite lately into the Park."

"Well, for my part," said the host, "I don't see anybody to come near Lady——"

"Headley," broke in young Miller, with intemperate wrath, "we will drop this, if you please. I happen to know Miss North."

There was an embarrassed pause; the announcement of the price of cold beef at the Reform Club could not have excited more surprise.

"My dear fellow," said Headley, good-naturedly, "I beg a thousand pardons; and I envy you."

So the little incident passed off quietly enough; but was it not apparent to every one present that there was some special reason for the high colour on the young man's face? Of course, if they had known that he was acquainted with Miss North, they would not have spoken of her; but had they said any harm of her? Would he have been as angry over the mention of the name of the Princess of Wales, or Lady Dudley, or Baroness Burdett-Coutts? They drew their own conclusions.

And as for him—this chance mention of Violet did not increase his happiness. It was evident, then, that she was attracting attention, as was natural. Whatever imagination he had was inflamed by a sudden and secret fire of jealousy; and a thousand devils appeared in the smoke. He hated even the innocent person on the other side of the table who had betrayed interest in Miss North by asking her name. He hated the idle, lolling crowds in the Park, who stared, and criticised, and—worst of all—admired.

Well, as soon as dinner was over, and his companions went up to the smoking-room, he stole off for a few minutes, and sate down to write a letter to Violet North. It was a very penitent letter. He confessed that he had been impatient and unreasonable. If she would forgive him this time, he would not again ask her for any pledge or assurance. She should be perfectly free. He would be content if she in the meantime would give him only her friendship, and would take his chance of the future. And was she going to the flower-show at South Kensington on Thursday ?

This letter he sent up to Euston Square by the club commissionaire, so that Violet received it when she returned in her four-wheeler from visiting her friends in the south. Now she was in a very gentle frame of mind —she generally was after seeing them. It was evident the young man was grieved about their quarrel; and she was sorry to have given him pain. She did not sit down to answer the letter there and then; but she resolved that the reply should be a kind and friendly one.

He received her note the following evening; he had been early at his rooms to wait for it. It was the first scrap of her writing that had come into his possession: a thrill went through his heart even as he looked at his own name outside written by her hand. He opened the envelope quickly; his eye seemed to catch the sense of the page before he had time to read the lines; he knew at least she was not deeply offended. He read the letter, and then got up and went to the window, and stared down into Half Moon Street. He read it again, and kept staring at the paper, mechanically noticing the curious fashion (apparently French) in which she formed her capital *I*'s. He read it over two or three times, and yet seemed possessed with the notion that he ought to discover more from these simple words.

There was, indeed, a studied simplicity about them. She told him, briefly and plainly, that she hoped they would remain good friends; that the cause of this recent disagreement was well known to both of them, and could be avoided; and that she was very glad he had pointed out to her the necessity of guarding against misconstruction.

He was very soon to find out what this last phrase meant.

Violet went with Lady North and her daughters to the flower-show, and there, naturally enough, was Mr. George Miller, very smartly dressed, a trifle self-conscious, and obviously anxious to be attentive to the whole party. The bright summer-day, the rich masses of colours, the sweet and ever-varying perfumes, and the cheerful music outside—all this was pleasant enough; and Violet, who was not sated with the ordinary sights and occupations of London life, was enjoying herself thoroughly, and was most friendly in her treatment of him. A rumour that some royal personages had arrived, and were going through one of the tents, caused a gentle rush of the crowd in that direction, and with the crowd went Lady North and her daughter; so that inadvertently Violet and Mr. Miller were left by themselves, if not quite alone. That did not make any alteration in her manner—she was deeply interested at the moment in a sensitive-plant—but it did in his.

"Violet," said he, in a low voice, "I have nothing of yours that—that I can keep by me; will you give me a flower?"

She turned round with something of coldness in her manner.

"That would be flirtation, would it not?" she asked, with some little dignity.

"What is the use of raking up that old quarrel?" he said, in an injured way. "I thought that was to be forgotten."

"Yes," she answered, in the same measured and clear fashion, "but not the lesson of it. I think it is better we should have a distinct understanding about that. I do not wish to do anything you can reproach me with afterwards; for who can tell what may happen?"

Her meaning was clear enough. She was determined to give him none of that "encouragement" on which he might presume to found a claim, or to substantiate a charge of fickleness and treachery. It came to this, then: if he liked to have their present relations continue, well and good; but it was distinctly to be recognised that she was not responsible. Now this was an intelligible position to be taken up by a young woman who did not find that she cared about a young man to that degree which would warrant her in encouraging his hopes; but it could not be expected to recommend itself to the young man.

"I think you are very hard on me," said he, rather gloomily.

"Oh, don't think so!" she said, quickly, with an anxious kindness in her eyes. "I don't mean to be so, at any rate. But it is not fair to you, nor to myself, that—that——"

"I see how it is," he said, bitterly. "You cannot forgive me for that one phrase."

"Indeed I have," she said, earnestly. "Only it opened my eyes. Perhaps I was wrong in letting you go to papa. But you know you told me that I was absolutely unpledged—that it was all a 'perhaps'—that you were quite content to wait and see——"

"And so I am!" he said, with unusual decision of manner, and his voice was low and rapid. "I don't care what happens; I am too deeply pledged already; you can be as free as you like. Men have done more foolish things for smaller prizes. I will take my chance. And yet, I don't think most girls are as hard as that——."

"I will give you a flower, if you wish it," she said.

She looked around, and at length descried a bit of blossom that had fallen or been cut off.

"Will that do?" she asked.

He took it from her, threw it on the ground, and kicked it aside.

"I don't want it from you in that way. I will wait until you can give me a flower without looking as if I had put you on the treadmill."

"Ah, well," she said, with a sigh, "I am sorry we should quarrel so. Shall we go and see where Lady North has gone?"

"Violet!" he said, "I—I beg your pardon. I don't wish to quarrel; but yet it seems hard that you should be so proud and indifferent—and I get angry, that's a fact—but I am very sorry. Come, let us be friends again."

"Very well," she said.

"Give me another bit of flower?"

She began to laugh.

"Isn't this just a little too childish? You make me think I am back at Miss Main's again, and quarrelling over a bit of slate-pencil. The flowers don't belong to me."

"It may be childish, and very ridiculous, to you; but it isn't quite so to me. However, I will wait for that flower. Perhaps you will give it to me some day."

"I suppose you mean to tease me until I do?"

"If I thought that would get it for me, I would."

"I have heard of girls being teased into an engagement—giving in through sheer weariness. I think it is rather dangerous. I should fancy the man would take his revenge out after the marriage; for of course he would look on her previous disinclination as mere perversity."

"I wish you would give me the chance," he said, with a bright look on his face. "You would see what revenge I should take."

The aspiration was an honest one. Young Miller had a fair and moderate notion of his own merits. He knew he could not paint fine pictures of his sweetheart, or write poetry about her, or do anything particularly romantic or imaginative; but he had heard in his time of these *dilettante* fellows marrying the objects of their adoration only to neglect them for flirtations with other women. He, now, was a plain and practical person; but he could assure his wife an honest and attentive husband, who would work hard for her, and see that she lived in good style. If he only had the chance, as he said, Violet would see what a husband he would make.

Unfortunately this remark of his only alarmed her. It seemed as though, whatever she might say to him, the conversation always led up to this one point; and the girl naturally blamed herself for so "encouraging" him. She immediately became rather reserved in manner, and insisted on going off in search of her friends.

They found them easily enough; but in

strolling about the grounds, Mr. Miller had plenty of opportunities of talking to Violet by herself.

"I suppose you are going to the Royal Academy conversazione?" said he.

"Would it be making an appointment if I said I was?" she asked, with gentle malice.

"No, it would not; for I haven't got a card."

"Then I am going. Lady North will take Anatolia and me; papa doesn't care about it."

"I should like to go," young Miller said, wistfully. "I suppose Mr. Drummond would let me have his card for once?"

"I hope you won't ask him," said Violet, sharply.

"Why not?" he said, innocently. "It is no novelty to him. He knows all those artist-fellows. What is a conversazione more or less to him? He does not go to one-fifth of the places he is asked to."

"You have no right to demand such a favour," she said. "Besides, the cards are sent to particular people; they are not to be bandied about like that. And I know that Mr. Drummond is going."

"Oh, you know he is going?"

"Yes. But I know he would give the card to anybody who asked him—if that is allowed—so I hope you won't ask him."

"You seem very anxious to see him."

"Yes, I am—at least, not anxious, but of course I hope to see him."

"Oh, well," said Mr. Miller, carelessly, "I can easily get a card if I want to go, without asking Mr. Drummond. I know a twopenny-halfpenny sort of fellow called Lavender, who is good at everything but earning a farthing of his own money, and he will get me a card. I suppose a hundred will go to look at the Princes, and one to look at the pictures."

"Then I hope you will be that one," said Violet, sweetly.

"You know what I shall go for," he said; and she turned away at that—the conversation had again led up to one of those awkward climaxes, which seemed to pledge her more and more, however definitely she protested.

So the days went by at this time; the young man paying her very nearly as much attention as though an engagement had existed between them; she secretly fearing, and yet sheltering herself behind repeated explanations that she was absolutely free, and unprejudiced by any of his hopes and aspirations. Occasionally, of course, she could not help being kind to him; for she really liked him; and his patient devotion to her moved her pity. Many a time she wished he would go; and then she hesitated to inflict on him the pain of dismissal. It was altogether a dangerous position.

The days going by, too, were gradually bringing the London season to an end; and people were talking of their autumn tours. Violet had not ventured to ask Lady North to let her accompany Mrs. Warrener to the Highlands; but she had spoken about this trip; and hinted that she would rather be going thither than to Venice. Mrs. Warrener had not ceased to entreat her to come with them.

One bright forenoon a pair of small greys were being driven briskly up Camberwell Grove by a young lady who seemed pleased enough with her task. It was a fresh, clear day in July; the yellow road ascending before her was barred across by the grey shadows of the chestnuts; here and there a lime-tree sweetened the air, for there had been rain in the morning. Her only companion was the man behind, who was doing his best to watch over a number of potted fuchsias which gave him the appearance of being an elderly cupid in a grove of flowers. The phaeton was pulled up at the gate leading to a certain boarding-school; and the man, struggling out from among the fuchsias, jumped down and went to the horses' heads.

Now this was rather a tall and shapely young lady who went into the boarding-school; and she wore a tight-sleeved and tight-fitting dress of chocolate-coloured homespun, with a broad-brimmed hat and bold feather of the Sir Joshua Reynolds' period, just then coming into fashion; and altogether she presented so fine and commanding an appearance that the small schoolmistress, on coming in, was overcome with astonishment, and could only say—

"Oh, Miss North!"

Yet Miss North was not an apparition—at least apparitions do not ordinarily shake one firmly by the hand, and say, with a bright smile—

"You remember me? Have I grown? Oh, Miss Main, it is very strange to call on you; for the moment I came into the hall I fancied I was going to be punished—I suppose you remember——"

"Oh, yes, I remember," said the schoolmistress, with a shrewd smile, and yet she was still puzzled by the alteration in this old pupil of hers, and had scarcely the presence of mind to ask her to sit down.

"But I thought I would bring something to propitiate you," this handsome young lady continued, with the greatest self-possession and cheerfulness, "so that you won't give me twenty pages of *Minna von Barnhelm* to translate—it is some fuchsias—they are outside

—will you please to ask Elizabeth to fetch them in?"

"Oh, that is so kind of you, Miss North," said the schoolmistress (she had not even yet sated her wonder and curiosity over the young lady's dress and appearance and manner); "but I suppose you don't know Elizabeth has left us. She left to get married more than a year ago."

"I thought she would," said Miss North, calmly. "I used to write her love-letters for her. How much of *Minna von Barnhelm* should I have had to translate if you had found *that* out, Miss Main?"

"Indeed," said the schoolmistress, frankly, "I think you were the wickedest girl I ever had in my school."

"I am afraid you are right," said Miss North, meekly.

"But what a change there is, to be sure! That's what I often said—I often said you would never be brought under proper control until you were married——"

"But I am not married yet, Miss Main,"

said the young lady, with heightened colour.

"It will not be long then, I dare say," replied the schoolmistress.

"Indeed it will be a very long time—it will be always and altogether," said Miss North, promptly.

"You mean never to get married?"

"Certainly."

After that Miss Main thought she might as well send for the fuchsias; and when the flowers were brought in, she was greatly pleased by this instance of friendliness on the part of her old pupil, and she would have had her sit down and have some strawberries and cake. But Miss North could not wait to partake of these earthly joys.

"I am going on at once to Mr. Drummond's," she said.

"Mr. Drummond is not at home," said Miss Main, hoping to have an opportunity of showing Lady North's daughter to a later generation of scholars; "I saw him pass here about an hour ago."

"I know," said Violet; "this is the morning he goes to that Society in Jermyn Street. It is Mrs. Warrener I am going to see."

So, with many a friendly word, and promise to repeat the visit, she got into the phaeton again and drove on up the hill. She found Mrs. Warrener alone, as she had expected. She took off her hat and put it on the table. Then she proposed they should go out into the garden.

"For I have something of great importance to say to you," she said, solemnly.

"Indeed!" remarked Mrs. Warrener, expecting to hear of another quarrel with Lady North.

"Oh, it is no laughing matter," Violet said at once. "It is simply this—Am I or am I not to get engaged to Mr. Miller?"

"Violet!" exclaimed Mrs. Warrener, astounded by the girl's direct habit of speech. "You cannot be talking seriously. Why should you ask such a question of me?"

"Because I have no one else to go to for advice," she answered simply.

"But surely that is a matter on which no girl needs advice. It ought to be determined by your own feelings."

"If that were all, I should have no difficulty," said the young lady, not without some pride in her tone. "I don't wish to marry anybody. I would rather be free from all the—the bother and persecution——"

"Then why should you suffer it?"

"Well," said she, looking down, "perhaps you may have partly brought it on yourself by your own carelessness—and you don't wish to—to appear—unkind——"

They had now got out into the garden.

"Violet," Mrs. Warrener said, distinctly, "this is the question: Do you really care for him?"

"N—no," the girl stammered.

"Then why not tell him so?"

"You cannot be going about insulting all your friends in that way."

"All your friends are not asking you to marry them."

"Oh, that is a different matter," said Violet, earnestly. "He does not ask me to marry him—not at all. This that he is always asking for is only an engagement—and I am not to be bound by it in any way——"

"Now, what do you really mean?" her friend said, seriously. "Or what can he mean by such proposals? What sort of an engagement is it that binds him and leaves you free? And what sort of an engagement is it that does not promise marriage?"

"Well, that is what he proposes," said Violet, doggedly. "He knows quite well that I will not promise to marry him; for I do not wish to marry anybody. And he does not even talk of that now."

They walked about for a bit, Mrs. Warrener saying nothing. At last she said—

"I think I see how it is. The notion of marriage frightens you—or you are too proud to like the idea of the submission and surrender of marriage—and Mr. Miller, being a shrewd young man, has found that out, so he wants you to enter into a vague engagement—which will not frighten you, or alarm you about the loss of your independence—and you apparently don't quite know what it means. Take care."

"Oh, but you don't know, Mrs. Warrener," the girl said, quite humbly, "you don't know what I think about these things, if you fancy I am so proud as that, or that I should like to be always independent. If I were to marry any man I should like to feel myself quite helpless beside him—looking to him always for guidance and wisdom—I should be his one worshipper, and everything he might do would be right to me. I should be ashamed of myself to even dream of independence. But then—but then—" she added, with her eyes still cast down, "the men you can admire and trust like that are not often met with—at least, for my part, I have only——"

"You must have met one, anyway," said Mrs. Warrener, with a kindly smile.

"Oh, no, not necessarily," the girl said, almost with alarm. "It is a fancy of mine—you know the nonsense that gets into a school-girl's head."

Mrs. Warrener, with such ability as she

possessed, and with a wonderful and friendly patience, was trying to understand this girl and her odd and apparently contradictory sentiments. The only key to these that the worthy little woman could find was this—Here was a proud self-willed girl, who had a sweetheart whom she regarded with a more tender affection than she cared to disclose. Like most girls, she chose to be very reticent on that point; if questioned, she would answer with a stammering "N—no." On the other hand, the sweetheart is impatient of these mystifications, and wishes her to promise to marry him. She rebels against this pressure put upon her; probably treats him with undeserved coldness, but all the same comes to a friend to see what the world would think of her entering into some sort of engagement. She wishes some one to tell her she can enter into this engagement without exposing herself to the suspicion —against which she revolts—that her secret affection is stronger than her pride.

Such was Mrs. Warrener's theory. It was ingenious enough, and it was but a natural deduction from what she had seen of the conduct of many girls in similar circumstances, only it was altogether wrong in the case of Violet North, and it was the parent of a terrible amount of mischief.

"Violet," said she, in her kindly way, "it is no use my advising you, for a girl never quite tells you what her real feelings are about a young man. You said you did not care about Mr. Miller——"

"Perhaps I ought to have said that I like him very well," she said, looking down. "There is no doubt about that. I like him far better than any of the young men I have met, for he is less languid, and he does not patronize you, and talk to you as if you were a baby; he is earnest and sincere—and then, when you see how anxious he is to be kind to you——"

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Warrener, with some little show of triumph, "I thought there was something behind all that reluctance of yours, Violet. It is the way with all you girls. You will admit nothing. You don't care for anybody. You positively hate the notion of being married. But all the same you go and submit to be married, just like your mothers before you, and there is an end of pretence then."

"I hope you don't think, Mrs. Warrener," said the girl, with flushed cheeks, "that I have been asking you to advise me to get married?"

"No, no, Violet," her friend said, gently. "You wouldn't do that. But I think I can see the end of all this hesitation."

"What end then?"

"You will marry Mr. Miller."

"I am not married to Mr. Miller yet," she said, almost coldly; and then she abruptly changed the subject.

Another part of her mission was to deliver an invitation to her two friends in the south to dine at Euston Square on the evening of the Royal Academy *soirée.* Sir Acton would be up in Yorkshire; perhaps Mr. Drummond would kindly assume the guardianship of the small party of ladies. Mrs. Warrener could not, of course, answer for her brother, but she was sure he would do anything to please Violet.

Then the young lady went her way. Why did she drive so fast?—her mouth proud and firm, her figure erect.

"I am not married yet"—this was what she was saying to herself—"they will have to wait a little while before they see me married!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AMONG SOME PICTURES.

THIS almost seemed a small family-party that was met round Lady North's dinner-table; and it was in any case a sufficiently merry one. Mr. Drummond was in one of his gravely extravagant moods; and Lady North, following his whimsicalities as far as her fancy permitted, was amused in a fashion, though she was very often puzzled. For who could tell whether this bright-eyed man, with his discursive talk, his impossible stories, his sham advice, was in jest or earnest? Violet was delighted; perhaps the occasional bewilderment of Lady North did not lessen her enjoyment.

"But did you never hear," said he, when his hostess was complaining seriously about the way in which certain groceries or other things were adulterated; "did you never hear, Lady North, of the man who starved himself rather than be cheated?"

"N—no," said she, with wide eyes.

Violet smiled to herself. She knew there was no such person. There never had been any such person. He was continually lugging in imaginary men of straw, and making them toss their impossible arms about.

"Oh, yes," he continued, calmly; "he was a very strict and just man, and he was so indignant over the way this tradesman and the next tradesman cheated him, that he cut off the supplies, one after the other, to revenge himself on them. First the butcher went, because he was always sending in short measure. Then the baker went, because of alum and other tricks. At last this man was living on nothing but milk, when it occurred to him to have the milk analysed. There was about 30 per cent. added water in it; and that went to his heart. His last hope was gone. To spite the milkman, he resolved to cut off the milk too; and so he shut himself up in a room, and died;—his protest could go no further than that. You see, Lady North, we must make up our mind to be cheated a good deal; and to take it with a good temper. An equable temper is the greatest gift a man can possess. I suppose you've heard of the duke who had everything he could desire, and who died of anxiety?"

Violet nearly burst out laughing this time. Of course there was no such duke.

"Oh, yes; he was so afraid of having his pictures, and rare engravings, and old jewellery burned, that he set about getting them all in duplicate; and he had a duplicate house built to receive them. But of course it was no use. He could not get complete sets of the engravings; and he used to wander about Italian towns searching for old glass and jewellery until he grew to be a haggard and awful skeleton. Care killed him in the end. If you keep brooding over all the possibilities of life, you cannot avoid being miserable. I once knew a man——"

Still another? Violet began to think of the dozen "supers" in the theatre, who are marched round and round the scenery, to represent the ceaseless procession of an army.

"——who used to be quite unhappy whenever he ate a herring; for he used to wonder whether a herring ever had rheumatism, and then he considered how dreadfully a herring must suffer in such a case, from the quantity of bones it had. But of course you cannot always command your fancies, and say that you will be free from anxiety; and the most helpless time I know is early in the morning, if one has wakened prematurely, and cannot get to sleep again. Then a touch of hoarseness in the throat conjures up visions of diphtheria; and if you cannot recollect some trifling matter, you begin to look on the lapse of memory as a warning of complete mental breakdown and insanity. Everything is bad then; all your affairs are going to the dogs; you have offended your dearest friend. But at breakfast-time, don't you wonder how you could have been so foolish as to vex yourself about nothing? The increased vitality of the system clears the brain of forebodings. There are other times, too, in which the imagination is stronger than the reason. I once knew a very learned man——"

Another!

"——who declared to me that sea-sickness was in nine cases out of ten a matter of apprehension; and that he knew he could argue himself into a quiescent mood that would defy the waves. But just as we were going on board the boat, he looked up and saw a cloud sailing smoothly along, and I could see he was thinking with a great longing how fine it would be to lie down in that cloud and be taken quietly across——"

"Was he ill in crossing?" demanded the literal little woman at the head of the table.

Mr. Drummond started. He had conjured up the incident so far; but he knew nothing further.

"I don't know," he said; and Lady North wondered how a reasonable person could tell a story and leave out its chief point of interest.

That evening a young man was flitting rather restlessly about the entrance-hall of Burlington House, watching the successive carriages come up, and the successive parties of ladies, with their long trains flowing on the stairs, pass up to have their names announced above. He kept looking at his watch; then at the next carriage that came up; and was altogether restless and dissatisfied.

At length, however, a particular carriage came rolling into the courtyard, and he swiftly went down the broad stone steps. He himself opened the door. Who was the first to step out into the light? a tall young girl, who had apparently had her dress designed by an artist, for it was all of a radiant lemon-yellow silk, the sleeves alone, near the shoulder, being slashed with black velvet; while in her jet-black masses of hair were intertwined leaves and blossoms of the yellow-white jessamine. She looked surprised.

"Then you have come after all?" she said, when he was assisting her three companions out of the carriage.

"Yes," he said; adding, "How fortunate I should meet you here, Lady North. You have no one with you?"

"Oh, yes," said Lady North. "Mr. Drummond is coming directly, in a hansom."

"I think we had better go in," said the young man, "he will find you readily enough when he comes."

"Oh, no," remarked the young lady with the pale yellow flowers in her hair—and she spoke with some decision—"we shall wait for him here. I particularly wish Mr. Drummond to take Lady North through the people because he knows everyone."

Well, the young man had no objection to that; for, of course, he would be left in charge of the others. Then Mr. Drummond came up, light-hearted, buoyant, and careless; and indeed it seemed to the younger man that this tall and good-humoured person, when he undertook to escort a party of ladies to the Royal Academy conversazione, might at least have taken the trouble to tie his necktie a little more accurately.

They passed up the stairs. They caught a glimpse of many faces and bright lights. Their names were announced. Sir Francis, standing near the door, shook hands with Mr. Drummond as with an old friend—they made their way along the narrow lane that had been formed by people curious to see the new arrivals. Which of this party attracted most attention? Mrs. Warrener, who was by the side of Violet, knew well —whether or not the girl herself was aware —how all eyes followed her as she passed.

If she was aware of it, she was not much embarrassed. They had scarcely got well into the miscellaneous crowd when she suddenly caught her companion's arm.

"Listen!"

There was a sound of soft and harmonious music, the deep voices of men, and the playing of instruments; and then high above that, rising as it were to the vaulted roof, the clear singing of boys—singing as with the one strong, high, and sweet voice of a woman.

"Where are they singing?" Violet asked;

and then she led her companion to the central hall, where, with all manner of busts and figures looking strangely down on them, the crowd stood in a circle round the Artillery band, the boys in the centre. By this time Violet and her companion had got separated from Mr. Drummond and Lady North; Mr. George Miller was paying compulsory attention to his friend Anatolia.

But this division of the party did not last, of course, the whole evening. Its various members met and parted in new combinations, as various objects of attraction suggested; this one lost in admiration of the music; the other fascinated by particular costumes; a third anxious that everybody should see his or her favourite picture. On one of these occasions Mr. Drummond and Violet together happened to be looking at a picture based on the tragic death of Helen of Kirkconnell.

It is now two or three years since this picture was exhibited, and I must not hazard overpraise of its merits; but, at all events, it endeavoured to give visible form to what (as it seems to some of us) is the most passionate and pathetic utterance of human emotion in all modern literature,—if this wild, sharp cry of anguish is to be called literature. Moreover, it dealt only with one episode in the brief tragedy, where Helen of Kirkconnell—Burd Helen she is called in some of the versions—is walking with her lover in the evening, and suddenly throws herself before him to receive the death-shot fired at him by his rejected rival: it does not deal with the fiercer portion that follows.

> "O think na but my heart was sair"—

—this is the pathetic introduction to the wild, glad deed of vengeance—

> "When my love fell and spake nae mair;
> I laid her down wi' meikle care,
> On fair Kirconnell lea.
>
> "I laid her down: my sword did draw,
> Stern was our fight by Kirtleshaw:
> *I hewed him down in pieces sma',*
> For her that died for me."

"It is a sad story," Drummond said, absently, when he had told it to her.

"I do not think that," she answered quickly; and he was surprised to see that her face was quite pale, and her dark eyes full of tears. "I think these are the two very happiest people I ever heard of in the world."

She stopped for a moment; he dared not look, for he guessed that the proud lips were trembling.

"Don't you?" she said, boldly. "A woman who is able to die for the man she loves, a man who has the delight of killing the man who slew his sweetheart: I think they have had everything that life can give. But—but that was in the old time—there is no more of that now; when people care for each other now, it is a very gentle affection, and they are more concerned about having a good income, and being able to drive in the Park——."

"But people who drive in the Park may love each other," he said.

"I don't believe it," she said, and then she abruptly turned away.

Mr. George Miller came up.

"Violet," he said, in a gentle and tender voice, "do come over here and look at this picture. I think it is awfully good."

She crossed the room, proudly and silently. Mr. Miller led her to a very nice and pleasing composition, which had rather won upon his heart, and which—who knows?—he may have thought would have a similar influence on her. It represented a quiet nook on the Thames, with a long pleasure-boat moored in at the roots of the trees, and in the boat were two very pretty young ladies and a good-looking young fellow—he was not unlike Miller himself—in boating-flannels and a straw hat. The picture was called "Meditation." There was a luncheon-basket, half-opened, in the stern of the boat.

"Now, that is what I call real life," said Mr. Miller. "That is the sort of thing you actually see. Just look at that swan; you would think he was going to open his mouth for a biscuit."

"That is the sort of picture I hate," she said, with unnecessary vehemence; and he was considerably startled; "and I hate the people quite as much who could live such a trivial, dawdling, purposeless sort of life. I wonder what they are *meditating* on! Very pretty *meditations* they are likely to have! On the advisability of eating lobster-salad? On the sweet poetry the curate quoted on Sunday? On the chances of their winning gloves at Goodwood? And as for him, a tailor's window would be the most suitable place in the world for him."

He was astounded by this outburst; he could not understand what it meant.

"You are rather savage to-night," said he, coldly. "I don't see that the man has done you any harm by painting a pretty picture."

"I detest such pictures."

"Well, you needn't look at them, if they offend you."

"I must look at them when I am asked to do so, and when I am told that they are beautiful."

This was rather a cruel remark; but Mr. Miller unexpectedly showed good nature.

"Well, there is no accounting for tastes," said he, pleasantly. "I like pictures like that, because I understand them. They are the sort of thing that one sees in real life. Now I have no doubt that the solemn and mysterious business—an ugly woman with her face painted against a green sky—is very fine; but I can't see the beauty of ugliness myself."

"Where is Lady North, do you know?" she said.

"I saw her go into the next room a minute ago," he answered.

Now, if Violet had been put out of temper by being asked to look at a very harmless and innocent picture, she was restored, not only to her usual serenity, but to a quite abundant graciousness, by the news she heard when she again encountered her stepmother.

"Violet," said the little woman, "Mr. Drummond has been pressing me very hard to let you go with his sister and himself to Scotland. "Would you like to go?"

"I should like very much to go."

"Well, I don't see any objection," Lady

North said, " except that it is rather presuming on their hospitality——"

" Ah, they don't think of such things," said Violet, quickly.

" They are not very rich, you know."

"That is just it," the girl said, rather proudly. " It is because they are not rich that they are generous and kind to everyone; they have not a thought about money——"

" Well, well," said Lady North, " they seem in any case to be very kindly disposed towards you; and you must go and thank them now for the invitation. There is Mr. Drummond over in the corner."

" I—would—rather go to Mrs. Warrener," said Violet, with some hesitation. " Where has she gone with Anatolia ? "

Lady North was in all simplicity surprised to see the effect of this concession of hers on Violet's friends. Was it really possible that they could so much enjoy her society ? They seemed to be quite grateful to her for allowing Violet to go with them; whereas she herself had been looking forward with very considerable anxiety to the necessity of taking that young lady to Italy. It was well, she thought, in any case, that the girl had taken this fancy for people who did appear to have some control over her.

Naturally enough, when all the splendour of the evening was over, and the brilliancy of the rooms exchanged for the rainy squalor of the streets, Mr. Drummond and his sister, who went home in a cab, had much to say about this visit to the north, and Violet's going with them. After they got home, too, they kept chatting on about this subject; the time running away unheeded. James Drummond seemed highly pleased about the whole arrangement; and he was already painting all sorts of imaginative pictures of Violet's experiences of Highland lochs, moors, sunsets, and wild seas.

"And then," said his sister, "we must ask Mr. Miller up for a time."

"Oh, certainly."

"I see," she said, with a smile, "I must get over my objection to that young man marrying Violet."

He raised his eyes quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," she said, with a sort of good-natured shrug, "I believe it is inevitable now. Either they are engaged or about to be engaged."

A quick look of pain—so sharp and rapid that she did not notice it—passed over his face.

"Has she told you so?" he said, calmly.

"No; but she came to ask my advice about it the other day; and she talked just as a girl always talks in these circumstances—pretending to care nothing for him—treating his advances as tiresome—and yet showing you quite clearly that she would be very much disgusted if he took her at her word."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her to be governed by her own feelings."

"Yes, of course," he said, absently; and he seemed to be deeply occupied in balancing a paper-knife on its edge. "I am glad her people know of Miller's expectations; that relieves us from responsibility. It will be a pretty spectacle—these two young folks in the holiday-time of their youth enjoying themselves up there in the Highlands."

"I wish she had chosen somebody else,' Mrs. Warrener said, ruefully. "I suppose he is a good match; and he is very fond of her; but he is so dreadfully like every other young man."

"You must wait and see, Sarah," her brother said, gently. "Give him time."

"I would give him everything else in the world—except our Violet," she said. "However, if young people were quite sensible, they would always be finding out defects in each other, and they would never get married at all. He is a very well-intentioned young man: I think if you advised him to become a Buddhist, he would try. We shall see what influence Violet will have on him; perhaps she will conjure up something in him a little more out of the commonplace."

She bade him good-night now—though it was very near morning—and left him alone He sate there, lying back in his easy-chair with his ordinarily quick and piercing eyes grown vague and distant, as if they were trying to make some mystic words out of the meaningless symbols on the wall-paper. The clock on the mantelpiece ticked gently, the slow progress of the hands being unheeded.

He rose, with the air of a man who had been in a dream, and looked round. His attention was caught by bars of blue appearing through the yellow shutters of the window; the new day was drawing near outside; almost mechanically he passed round into the hall, took his hat, and let himself quietly out.

How still it was, in the half revealed darkness! Only the topmost leaves of the tall poplars, far away up there in the blue grey, seemed to be having a low and rustling talk together; down here, amid the darker foliage of the chestnuts, all was silence.

He walked on, quietly and aimlessly, past the voiceless houses and the gardens. Suddenly a sound made his heart leap—it was only a thrush that had burst asunder the spell of the night with the first notes of its morning song. And now there was a more perceptible light in the sky; and the stars were gone; and at last there appeared a strange violet colour, tinted with rose, that shone on the windows of the eastward-looking houses. The dawn had come—after the rain of the night—clear, and coldly roseate, and still.

"So the new days come," he was thinking to himself, "and the years slip by, and God takes away our youth before we know that we have it. And if all the imaginative longing of youth—that seeks satisfaction in the melancholy of the twilight and in the murmur of the sea, and does not find it there, but must have some human object of sympathy—if that romantic wistfulness of youth clings around the form of a young girl, and endows her with all the poetry of early years, can it ever be repeated again? Love may come again, and love of a stronger, and purer, and less selfish kind; but the wonder—perhaps not! and so I imagine that the old mystery of first love never quite goes even when the love goes, and that in after years, some sudden view of the sea or a new sweet scent in the air will bring back a throb of one's twentieth year and all the half-forgotten dreams. But if a man knows all that, and has missed it, can he have even a glimpse of it in later life ? There are some of us who have had no youth—only hours, and days, and years ; the wonder-time of love has never reached us ; and we have learnt physiology instead. I suppose all that must go. We can see the pretty pictures that young love makes ; we can smile sadly at its unreasonable caprice, its wild follies, its anger and tears of repentance. Happy youth, that knows not its own happiness—that would impatiently curtail the wonder-time—that is so eager after enjoyment that rose-leaves are dashed down of roses that will never bloom again. But after all, to live is to live ; and it is only those who are outside and apart, who are but spectators of the youth of others, who know how youth should be spent, and how grateful it should be for God's chiefest gifts."

He was neither sorrowful nor envious, to all appearance, as he walked on and communed with himself, listening to the full chorus of the now awakened birds, and watching the growing glory of the sunlight come over the green and rain-washed foliage of the trees. The tall, thin man, who stooped a little, and who walked briskly along, with one hand in his trousers-pocket, sometimes whistled absently as he went; and he had a quick attention for the flying birds, and the growing light, and the stirring of the leaves. He was all by himself in the newly-awakened world; not another human being was abroad. And when he had tired himself out with his walk, he returned home with something of gladness in his worn face; for it almost seemed as if he had got rid of certain mournful fancies, and had resigned himself to the actual and sufficiently happy life of the new day—the new day that was now shining over the plains where the cattle stood, and over the orchards and farmsteads, and over the glad blue seas all breaking in white foam around our English shores.

END OF VOL I.